*PIIKANI* SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

by

*Omaksaakoomapi* Bradford Roy Hall

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Education

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

July 2018

# DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late friend/adopted sister, *Aaniiih Nakoda* school leader Dr. Lynette Chandler. She inspired me with her words of encouragement and by the example she set for leaders in her community as the founder of the White Clay Immersion School.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## FACILITIES ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS CONTINUED

TABLE OF CONTENTS CONTINUED

## TABLE OF CONTENTS CONTINUED

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on *Piikani* school leadership as shared through the narratives and experiences of a retired school leader. *Noonaki*'s experiences chronicle her longevity in school leadership and steadfast commitment to integrating the *Piikani* culture and language into the schools she led on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. *Noonaki's* stories provide a realistic view of school leadership challenges she faced and offer her thought provoking knowledge to inspire current and aspiring school leaders to accept the *Piikani* values into their practices. School leaders are key to advancing *Piikani* values, culture, and language into the schools they serve on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Therefore, school leaders when developing relevant leadership practices, are called upon to commit themselves to practice *ai-sii-moki'* (guidance, teaching, and discipline), as they encounter and mitigate challenges among community stakeholders, specifically focusing on how they each can support student success. Through *Noonaki*'s transfer of knowledge from her to the researcher, this exchange encapsulates her experiences into stories, told in the places where she practiced school leadership. Community Centered Digital Storywork (CCDS), is an integrated *Piikani* knowledge dissemination framework, that leverages cultural protocols to capture *Piikani* ways of knowing. *Noonaki* inspires current and aspiring school leaders to build their skills and practices around the *Piikani* values of *okamotsitapiyiisin* (honesty), *ainnakowe* (respect), *aahsitapiitsin* (generosity), *waattosin* (spirituality), *matsisskii* or *iiyiikittahpii (*courage), *maanistapaisspipii* (humility), and *kimmapiiyipitsinni* (compassion).

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*Piikani* (Blackfeet) leadership has withstood the test of time, facing insurmountable challenges throughout an over 200-year history post-contact with European, American, and Canadian colonial powers. This style of leadership has contributed greatly to the retention of tribal lands as well as cultural revitalization efforts (Gladstone & Pepion, 2016). The school leadership challenge on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Northwestern Montana is to promote *Piikani* school leaders, who identify as *Piikani* and/or embrace the practical utility of *Piikani* values as enabling forces in overcoming systemic challenges related to education. This movement can also include individuals in school leadership capacities who are non-*Piikani* school leaders, who desire to learn from the community as they align their values and practices to meet its expectations. As school improvement continues to dominate the conversations surrounding schools serving *Piikani* students, systemic challenges remain a prevalent impediment to these schools; therefore, they will require responsive and relevant leadership to rise to the occasion and guide the processes that will garner greater student success. As more *Piikani* school administrators are being trained to assume school leadership roles on the reservation, these practitioners have begun to rethink their roles and responsibilities within colonially entrenched, standardized schooling structures, currently serving *Piikani* students.

The scope of the *Piikani* School Leadership project will mirror the experiences and expertise of a sole research participant, who has worked in school leadership capacities across the Pre-K – 14 education spectrum, specifically serving *Piikani* students

on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Previous research has segmented research to particular grade groupings (i.e. Pre-K, K-12, and or Higher Education); however, this project seeks to provide comprehensive and applicable value to all school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation across the Pre-K – 14 educational spectrums as they form connections that can be enacted by the intentional alignment of *Piikani* values into their school leadership practices. As this project forms connections between *Piikani* values, school leadership practices, and scholarship literature, it also places a distinct emphasis on how the use of *Piikani* values and leadership expectations of the community can be fostered to complement and be integrative of widely accepted school leadership practices. Any school leadership practices formulated from this project are to be intentionally aligned and entrenched in *Piikani* knowledge as it pertains to culturally-specific constructions of school leadership and values.

The rigid regimentation of public education (Warner, 2015) combined with high demands from the government and school stakeholders (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015), creates the need for culturally responsive training in Indigenous schools (Cummins, 2009). *Piikani* leadership pertains to an individual response that, through roles of leadership undertaken on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, supports community needs and cohesively builds upon successful endeavors, as enacting a culturally-specific style of leadership that is integrative of community values. Individual leaders have to be cognizant of how their leadership practices impact the community they serve, therefore the refinement of their practices must complement and model community expectations (Ladner, 2000). Aspiring school leaders, or individuals who work in education as

teachers, staff members, or other community-based education professionals, are rarely

exposed to the realities that they will experience when they assume school leadership

roles (Grayshield, Hurtado & Davis, 2015) on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. The

school leadership challenge in this context exists in navigating school systems that, by

design, meet euro-centric (Blakesley, 2008) and bureaucratic expectations that have

complicated school leadership (Wu, Hoy & Tarter, 2012), all while Indigenous schools

are being tasked to accomplish goals often out of line with cultural and community reality

(Barnhardt, (2015(b); Warner, 2015).

<center>Definition of Terms</center>

The general term used in this project is "school leader (s)," which relates to the

Pre-K – 14 contexts of supervisory or administrative positions over the curricula,

functions, and student supportive services that are functions of Pre-K and K-12 school

systems, as well as the local two-year tribal college (13-14) on the Blackfeet Indian

Reservation. As this project has a Pre-K – 14 focus, it is important to note that the

research participant's experiences have broadened the scope beyond the K – 12 contexts

and provide credible information for school leaders in the Pre – K and higher education

realms on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

The term "student(s)" refers to anyone within the Pre-K – 14 spectrums who is

directly impacted by the curricula, functions, and student supportive services of schools

on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. The term "teacher(s)" refers to an agent of the

school who is responsible for the delivery of the curriculum through providing instruction

and the assessment of student learning, typically referred to as certified, professional, or instructional staff. The term "staff member(s)" refers to an agent of the school who is responsible for the functioning of school operations and the delivery of student supportive services, typically referred to as classified staff. The term "parent(s)" refers to the biological or custodial guardian of a student attending a school on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

The term "community member(s)" refers to anyone from the Blackfeet Indian Reservation who takes an active interest in contributing to schools either through his or her volunteerism or professional advisory capacities, whether they have students attending the school or not. The term "*Piikani*" is used in the context to refer to the people who reside on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, the majority of whom identify as "Blackfeet" or "*Ampskapi Piikani.*" The term "*Piikani* value(s)" refers to the seven (7) values that are specific to the *Piikani* of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, as outlined in the Blackfeet Education Standards (2005) as Honesty, Generosity, Respect, Spirituality, Courage, Humility, and Compassion. The terms "culture" and "language" are used individually as well as collectively, to both emphasize the distinct interconnections within the *Piikani* context, as elements of culture and the use of language are not separated.

The use of the word "problem" is intentionally excluded from this dissertation and is replaced with the term "challenge." In framing this project, school leaders need to see challenges as a reality that is not only recognized but enables them to strategically position themselves to see beyond external characterizations of how research can tangibly lead to greater school/community success on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Key terms

for this project include: school leadership, culturally responsive schooling, culturally responsive pedagogy, *Piikani* leadership, *Piikani* values, Indigenous research methodologies, Community Centered Digital Storywork (CCDS), and the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Some of these terms are defined above and/or contextually defined in the literature review (Chapter 2).

<u>Foundations of *Piikani* Leadership</u>

The Blackfoot Confederacy is a long-standing historical alliance among four (4) tribal groups forged in a collective bond along the Rocky Mountains and onto the plains of current day Montana, USA and Saskatchewan/Alberta, Canada. The *Aapahtohsi Piikani* (Northern Blackfoot or Piegan), *Siksika* (Blackfoot), and *Kainai* (Blood) reside on "reserves" in the Canadian province of Alberta, while the *Amskapi Piikani* (Southern Blackfeet or Piegan) through the tribe's complicated history, has reserved reservation lands in north central Montana along the US/Canadian border for themselves. The general term "Blackfoot" is used to refer to all of the confederated tribes as a whole, whereas the term "Blackfeet" is used as reference to an individual within the confederacy and/or the tribe of the confederacy whose lands reside under the dominion of the United States of America (Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992). Each of these tribes, traditionally were divided into bands of related people each possessing its own respective leadership who could also aspire to higher leadership roles within the tribe and/or the confederacy (Hernandez, 1999). Each band allowed for the potential of any individual within it to be appointed as a leader. Followers revered active demonstration of *Piikani* values through

his or her leadership practices, which in turn justified influence among members of the band, tribe, and potentially the entire confederacy (Ladner, 2000). All leadership positions and decisions were determined through consensus among all members of the band or leaders within the tribe or confederacy (Gladstone & Pepion, 2016).

Each tribe within the confederacy had a head chief, who demonstrated the ability to lead based on his or her recognized unwavering commitment to the people, generosity toward others, experience in warfare/diplomacy, and efficient oratory/communication skills (such as sign language, especially with neighboring tribes or peoples who spoke different languages) (Ladner, 2000). *Piikani* leaders also actively participated in tribal community and ceremonial life, thus committing his or her entire lifetime to be in service to young as well as elderly people (Hernandez, 1999). Additionally, societies were formed within the confederacy to inform and transcend influence across tribal lines, thus, societies played instrumental functions within the Blackfoot Confederacy, ensuring the maintenance and integrity of values transferred down through the generations through social and spiritual leadership (Gladstone & Pepion, 2016).

In the contemporary context, school leaders could benefit greatly from the influence of the *Piikani* culture and language, as they transmit values into interactions that guide them to responsively serve his or her stakeholders. Commitment and vision related to rethinking school leadership is needed on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, so that practitioners are prepared to integrate values and expectations that promote culture and language as critical components in the development strategies that reflect community cultural identity. *Piikani* leadership is greatly influenced by the community's

expectations (Ladner, 2000), as this level of professional sensitivity provides them insight into developing institutional responses to address improvements and potential innovations that stem from cultural epistemologies (Gladstone & Pepion, 2016).

## Challenge (Problem) Statement

Until recently, *Piikani* leadership and values have not been researched in terms of how they have been applied to school leadership on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. There exists an extensive knowledge-base about school leadership in general and mainstream terms; however, within the *Piikani* context, there is no research that focuses on the integration of *Piikani* values within school leadership specifically. Unlike other leaders within the *Piikani* community, school leaders often operate under isolation with state and federal educational policies and systems; therefore, to a larger extent, school leaders' focuses should be inextricably linked to tribal and community systems that have long been disregarded. With school leaders being trained using research from predominantly non-Indigenous contexts (Grayshield, Hurtado & Davis, 2015; Barnhardt, (2015(b)), Western leadership orientations continue to dominate practices, and until now, have purposefully, through a profound lack of research, "othered" (Chilisa, 2012) feasible Indigenous leadership contributions to the field of school leadership (Martin, 2015). Current and aspiring school leaders without an introduction to culturally-specific educational contexts and examples, may not possess the foundational knowledge to understand the depth of skills and mentality required of them to assume school leadership positions in Indigenous schools (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010), like those on the Blackfeet

Indian Reservation. As previous research has not investigated school leadership from this particular context or lens, this project creates a seminal framework that connects *Piikani* values to school leadership practices that is absent of deficit orientated approaches or "problems." This project seeks to fill the gap that exists between school leadership practices and *Piikani* values as they relate to specific cultural/community expectations of leaders.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is to advance the understanding of *Piikani* leadership and values in the context of school leadership, thus promoting a culturally-specific style of leadership that integrates values of the *Piikani* into actionable, intentional, and accountable practices for school leaders to mitigate challenges experienced in the Pre K - 14 educational systems on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Students on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation are in dire need for schools to integrate *Piikani* values, culture, and language; therefore, it is incumbent upon school leaders to possess the initiative to meaningfully incorporate community culture into systems they influence. As he or she contributes, these values will reinforce his or her commitment to improving education on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. With a substantial number of school leaders emerging from the *Piikani* community in recent decades, the practical linkages between school leadership practice and *Piikani* culture and language integration have never indicated greater basis to substantiate inquiry into this matter.

This project's research question is, "How can school leaders use *Piikani* cultural values to inform their practices in mitigating systemic challenges in the Blackfeet Indian Reservation's Pre K- 14 educational systems?" The research participant's line of questioning beyond the research question was general and only aimed at uncovering experiences specific to her interpretation of how she correlated each of the *Piikani* values of Honesty, Generosity, Respect, Spirituality, Courage, Humility, and Compassion as outlined in the Blackfeet Education Standards (2005) into his or her practical experiences as a school leader.

Conceptual Framework

Identity is an amalgamation of influences that defines an individual and how he or she perceives his or her association within a group. This is because the individual requires gratification from the particular group he or she belongs to as part of a collective group identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The *Piikani* culture and language is influential in the transmission of community values, which the Blackfeet Education Standards (2005) framework emphasizes. The role of stakeholders is critical, yet not explicit in defining for school leaders what they need to possess to encourage such initiatives. *Piikani* cultural and community knowledge is obtained through the concept of "transfer," in which individuals are provided with knowledge to become inter-connected to community expectations in order to maintain his or her adherence to practicing cultural values as well as to accepting the responsibility to continue to "transfer" cultural and community knowledge to future generations (Bastien, 2004). The concept of "social categorization"

is in line with the *Piikani* belief that each individual has the capacity to be identified as

holding succinct abilities and gifts as he or she enters adulthood to play a unique role in

community life. Historically, *Piikani* leaders used their influence over others, not power,

which solidified their relevance within the community (Ladner, 2000; Long Standing

Bear Chief, 1992) of an individual's contributions to the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

However, group acceptance is based on these individuals possessing the values that are

critical for them to find individual success while contributing to the accomplishment of

community goals. The critical role of stakeholders is to define for the school leader how

the community understands his or her role, and is predominantly based on the school

leader's individual interactions with the stakeholders both formally and/or informally

(Curry, 2010). For *Piikani* leaders, it is essential for them to hold and practice values that

coincide with the community's values (Pepion, 1999).

Tribal communities are the source of knowledge for school leaders, and

understanding community culture provides insights on behaviors and practices that are

needed in schools serving Indigenous children (Brayboy, 2005). Social Identity Theory

(Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Tribal Critical Theory (Brayboy, 2005) conflict in how

individuals can use their connectedness to tribe-community-group as a source of

knowledge to strengthen personal values and beliefs. Furthermore, it is not just each

individual's contributions to the community, but how his or her efforts have helped others

within the group thrive. Belonging, in Social Identity Theory, means that individuals

prescribe to a particular image or set of values (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, Tribal

Critical Theory takes it further by examining the transfer of knowledge as a relational and

reciprocal exercise, an integral part of an individual's tribal-community-group functionality. The individual as an agent of conformity should further his or her awareness of community reality and positions related to challenges facing group outcomes (Brayboy, 2005). Rather than perpetuating only their ideas, individuals are called upon to not make contributions solely based on and as a reflection of Westernized theoretical approaches, but they need to take into account that every tribal-community-group setting has the potential to articulate individual limitations (Bastien, 2004).

Social Identity Theory and Tribal Critical Theory differ how individual roles are positioned in relation to their status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), as well as their overall influence over the tribe, communities, or groups that they encounter on a daily basis (Ladner, 2000). This concept, however, diminishes Indigenous existing community structures that enable individual enhancement as being complementary to community advancement (Brayboy, 2005), which, in the *Piikani* context, is a critical necessity for garnering community healing, growth, and development (Stone-Brown, 2014; Bastien, 2004, Hernandez, 1999; Pepion, 1999). Essentially, the school leader's understanding of the dynamics of these two theoretical frameworks provide more in-depth interpretation as to how community-based knowledge (i.e. *Piikani* cultural values) can improve individual practices by articulating from the position of the Tribal Critical Theory framework. Non-Indigenous theoretical frameworks that are applied within Indigenous communities are beginning to be challenged on the basis that they do not utilize community sources of knowledge in his or her construction and fail to recognize the importance of living systems related to inter-group lived experiences. Lived experiences have developed well

defined and culturally-specific models for approaching contemporary challenges, such as those typical of public education (Brayboy, 2005).

## *Piikani* (Blackfeet) Educational Standards (2005) and School Leadership

The *Amskapi Piikani*, Southern Piegan, or Blackfeet Nation developed the "Blackfeet Education Standards" (2005) to address the integration of knowledge, culture, and language into all educational settings serving students on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, focused primarily on K-12 education. The cultural conceptual model developed (pg. 12) is defined as two circles, one in the middle with the term "values" and the second circle is divided into four quadrants which include the terms, "students, communities, schools/colleges/education programs, and educators." Below the two circles are four feathers hanging down with the overarching components of, "language, culture, vision, and commitment." This project also seeks to emphasize the importance of recognizing place-based approaches and applications of research to enhance access to cultural knowledge that aligns with the aims of Indigenous research (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) and emergent *Piikani* methods. *Piikani* scholars point to the importance of places in relation to storytelling, as embedded in certain places and locations are memories as well as physical manifestations connected to maintaining the *Piikani* knowledge-base (Bastien, 2004).

*Figure 1. Piikani* "Blackfeet Education Standards" Framework, revised to meet the proposed integration of "school leaders" as a component in the Blackfeet Education Standards (2005) framework.
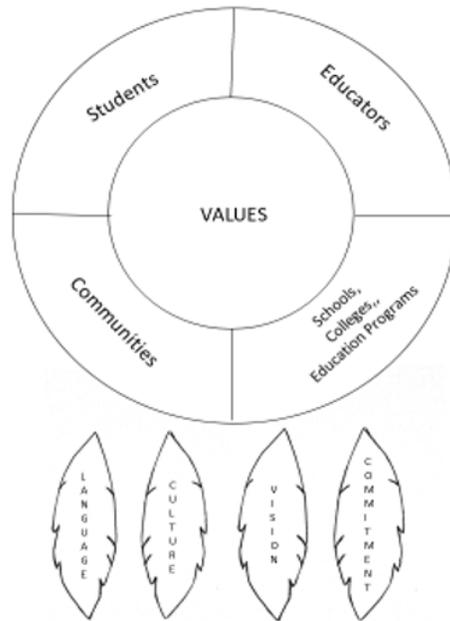


*Piikani* leadership qualities are based on the preferential values demonstrated by an individual's capacity to perform decision making from the context of benefiting the community; the "Hoop of Values" or "Markers for the Path of Life" values are identified in the Blackfeet Educational Standards (2005) by the following model, integrating four main leadership developmental focuses: personal, organizational, family, and tribal:

*Figure 2. Piikani* "Blackfeet Education Standards (2005)," "The Hoop of Values" Framework, outlining shared values as "Markers for the Path of Life" which includes Honesty, Generosity, Respect, Spirituality, Courage, Humility, and Compassion.
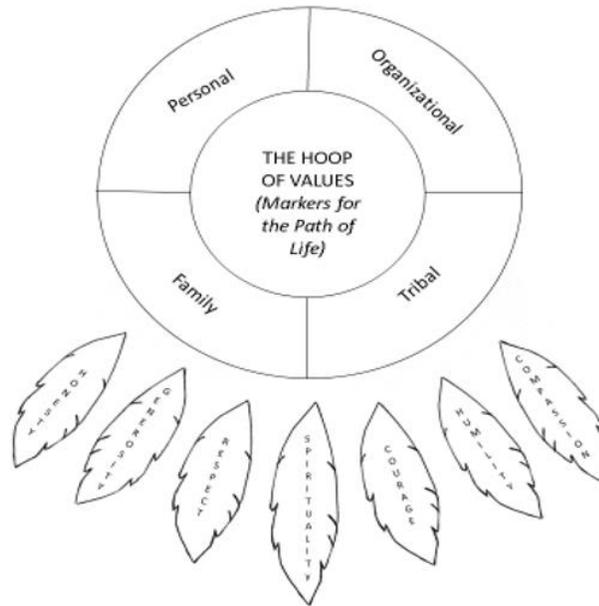


Noticeably absent from the Blackfeet Education Standards (2005) is any term that relates to administrators, program directors, school leaders, principals, superintendents, or presidents, all typical titles provided to school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Where do school leaders fit into the "Blackfeet Educational Standards" and are they responsible for the transmission of these values through interactions with school stakeholders supporting *Piikani* student learning? As a contribution to this model, it is plausible that the "values" identified embody a school leader's guide to articulate culturally-based expectations while informing his or her practices in ways that convey *Piikani* community and leadership values. Engaging with the community and its stakeholders may require the school leader to project *Piikani* values and other relevant

behaviors to gain recognition and influence over the Pre K – 14 educational systems they administer. Additionally, the four overarching components of this model direct school leaders to focus on the *Piikani* "culture" and "language" as fundamental in a school leader developing a "vision" through the demonstration of his or her "commitment" to providing culturally-based and responsive educational experiences for *Piikani* students. Dominant research paradigms have created confusion surrounding how research methods and related findings are connected to Indigenous community reality (Chilisa, 2012).

Overview of Project Methods

Community Centered Digital Storywork (CCDS) is the methodological framework of this project, where audiovisual interviews with the project's sole research participant were transcribed to contribute to the formation of data for a single exploratory case study. This methodology is also intent on shifting the researcher and research participant paradigm, which grants more control to the research participant and underscores the importance of integrating of *Piikani* protocols into defining the research parameters and processes being conducted on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

Introduction Summary: Significance of the Project

*Piikani* leadership has undergone many changes over the last century, primarily with the insertion of non-*Piikani* values that permeate systems on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Post-colonial leadership practices have resulted in little or no progress for the *Piikani*, both economically or socially (Ladner, 2000); therefore, the time has come to

rethink and revitalize traditional leadership practices, traits, and behaviors to focus on community well-being (Gladstone & Pepion, 2016).The resurgence of culture and language has opened an unprecedented opportunity for research to seek ways that change school leadership practices so they can be utilized and aligned to *Piikani* values. As school leaders interact with school and community stakeholders they can promote culturally responsive curriculum to enable Pre K - 14 school structures to be committed to student achievement through the articulation of *Piikani* values. Furthermore, the intentional integration of the Blackfeet Education Standards (2005) framework will require school leaders to dedicate themselves to understanding dynamics around the impact of *Piikani* culture and language on student learning, as well as justify evolving expectations to improving schools in a high-stakes, post-colonial environment. School leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation typically struggle to apply tangible connections between his or her collegiate programs of study, professional development, and the community context needed to serve *Piikani* students. The process of infusing *Piikani* values, culture, and language into school leadership would be of immense benefit, as they develop unique practices they then use to influence the Pre K – 14 educational systems they are entrusted to lead.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The review of literature for this project involved a variety of sources collected by the researcher from colleagues, the Montana University System library databases, and special collections (archives) at Blackfeet Community College. Literature reviewed included research regarding school leadership and emergent work on culturally responsive schooling from *Piikani* (and other indigenous) scholars. Also, an amalgamation of resources formed the Indigenous Research Methods (IRM) used in this project, along with congruent qualitative research protocols. Many of the sources extracted for this project are *Piikani*-specific or related to other Indigenous contexts as a foundation for weaving in Indigenous school leadership research and best practices with formal research on this matter. The *Piikani* values identified in this dissertation have not been formally researched; therefore, the researcher had to rely on sources that created cross-cultural connections between academic discourse and Indigenous educational scholars, as well as community-based sources promoting the *Piikani* culture and language. These practices will have a profound impact on a school leader's ability to responsively enact these skills within the context of Pre K – 14 school systems on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

## *Piikani* School Leadership Challenge

Moral actions and behavior are critical components of *Piikani* education and are widely accepted cultural traits among those tribes in the Blackfoot Confederacy (Hernandez, 1999). Standard leadership approaches as purveyed by collegiate programs of study are not sufficient and continue to damage the cultural integrity of communities, which have been exacerbated as high stakes testing and other achievement requirements have complicated the role of a school leader, as he or she often performs in situations beyond his or her own training (Martin, 2015). In the *Piikani* context, it is understood that values are not perpetual, but need to be reinforced to ensure the reversal of further cultural loss. Most school leaders set out to develop their own style of leadership and can use Indigenous concepts (Running Wolf, 1999) to enhance their practices. These school leaders are often sought to alleviate ethical and moral dilemmas in schools and often attempt to solve them through administrative processes (Deloria Wildcat, 2001). In these situations, where they are often responsible for investigating, assessing, and making decisions (Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011) related to solving persistent issues, school leaders are often needed to practice "crisis management" (Gipp, 2015).

Policies and procedures instituted by school leaders and boards, are intended to guide decision making. However, in the Indigenous educational context, a school leader needs to recognize, as part of his or her responsibility to the students, teachers, staff members, parents, and the community they serve, that policies and procedures need to be understood by all stakeholders as living documents that consistently need to be revised to meet new challenges facing the school. This is evident in the community via the elected

boards who are the primary guide to defining policies and procedures that are in alignment to the school's purpose (Beaulieu, 2015). This is realized in the practices, policies, and procedures that are used, as the enforcement of these rules should reflect an inherent commitment to ensure fairness and equality, a leadership style that is conducive to the local cultural values. The moral compass of a school leader is what (Sergiovanni, 1999) asserted when he determined that it is the responsibility of leaders to encourage all within every institution to accept the challenge of advancing "moral authority" by turning values into practice. Blending values and practice is done through interactions with the community as an expression of an individual's efforts and regulation of his or her own behaviors to not perpetuate traumas (Running Wolf, 1999).

School size and access on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation vary from school to school and/or district to district. Grade levels and other school factors in outlying communities are dependent on student enrollment. With the exception of Heart Butte (with its own high school), most students matriculate to the Browning based schools post-eighth grade, if not sooner. With the school population in the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in the fall of 2017 numbering at 3,333 students, 324 teachers, and 621 staff, and likely over 1,500 parents, the schools make a wide-reaching impact on the community both socially and economically. The Blackfeet Indian Reservation is also an incubator for alternative, parochial, language immersion, and tribal college educational opportunities, that widen the array of school choices which differ by grade level, curriculum, student capacity, and school leadership environments.

*Table 1*. School demographic data for the 2018-2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the Blackfeet Indian Reservation; School leader data provided by Cinnamon Crawford (8 April 2018)

| School Browning | Grade Level(s) | Student Enrollment | Teachers | Staff | Other information | School Leaders Piikani/ Non-Piikani |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Browning Public Schools** | K-12 | 2,171 | 177 | 371 | Includes Babb Elementary School (K-8), Glendale Elementary School (K-8), Big Sky Elementary (K-8), Buffalo Hide Academy (6-12) | 16/0 (100% Piikani) |
| **De La Salle School** | 3-12 | 72 | 13 | 18 | Parochial School | 0/1 (0% Piikani) |
| **Cuts Wood School** | K-8 | 31 | 5 | 9 | Language Immersion School | 1/0 (100% Piikani) |
| **Blackfeet Head Start** | Pre-K | 405 | 76 | 87 | Includes Head Start locations in Heart Butte, Starr School, and East Glacier | 1/0 (100% Piikani) |
| **Blackfeet Community College** | Post-Secondary | 378 | 27 | 68 | Two-Year Degrees, Certificates, 2+2 Programs | 4/1 (80% Piikani) |
| School Heart Butte | Grade Level(s) | Student Enrollment | Teachers | Staff | Other information | School Leaders Piikani/ Non-Piikani |
| **Heart Butte Public Schools** | K-12 | 204 | 21 | 55 | Located in Pondera County | 1/2 (34% Piikani) |

*Table 1. Continued*

| School East Glacier Park | Grade Level (s) | Student Enrollment | Teachers | Staff | Other information | School Leaders Piikani/ Non-Piikani |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **East Glacier School** | K-8 | 72 | 5 | 13 | Independent School District | 0/1 (0% Piikani) |
| | **Totals** | **3,333 Students** | **324 Teachers** | **621 Staff** | | **23/5= 28 School Leaders (88% Piikani)** |

With school demographics on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in mind, school leaders need to value and acknowledge the contributions and expectations of all stakeholders. If a school leader does not include stakeholders in his or her initiatives, it is likely that he or she will not be receptive to change or will feel compromised and powerless through a lack of involvement in school decisions. Change is harder when a school system is entrenched in maintaining the status quo among school leaders, teachers, and staff members who, by virtue of their respective roles, are conditioned to resist rather than comply with community expectations (Beaulieu, 2015).  Looking at similar populations with regard to culture and inclusion, all students should be provided with an educational setting that reflects their culture (Kugelmass, 2006) and community values should principally drive institutional goals toward student-centered improvements (Martin (2015). School leaders should provide for and build on the strengths of students, teachers, staff members, and the community to frame the careful facilitation through a

concise understanding of community learning processes that are reflected in educational efforts (Pepion, 1999). Western and Indigenous systems should be positioned to take from each sector what will form solutions, not declaring one system dominant over the other or disregarding community values (Lindquist, 2015).

<u>School Leadership in Indigenous Communities</u>

*Piikani* educational experiences have impacted views of public and boarding schools (Running Wolf, 1999) as these institutions are not generally viewed as an asset to the communities they serve, according to Hernandez (1999). As a result, value systems became diluted and without purpose, hence the perpetuation of traumas and violations of spirit among students and future generations which has dimmed the light that is education. Indigenous schools have struggled with low achievement since the perpetuated boarding school era which has served as the blueprint for how school leadership in Indigenous communities is practiced (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010; Tsianina-Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006), school leaders being recognized as the most important element in reforming schools. *Piikani* values are based in existing and ever present cultural frameworks that define the *Piikani* worldview, which does not place importance on differences; rather, all things are connected and support one another in no particular hierarchy, order, or authority (Little Bear, 2000).

Integrating a value-based school leadership model requires knowledge about the community to address multifaceted issues in a context that allows for sustainable and innovative changes or improvements to occur (Owens & Valesky, 2007). Maintaining

community balance and structure from traditional teachings of the *Piikani* brought strong personal awareness of their own capacities and responsibilities to the tribe (Hernandez, 1999).Currently, the integration of culture and language into schools serving Indigenous students is limited at best; therefore research should emphasize how a tribal member can individually determine his or her own style of culturally responsive schooling as the primary way in which their communities can thrive (Brayboy, 2005). Additionally, cultural considerations should be considered critical components as students are granted learning opportunities and relevant knowledge that allows them to build a high sense of self-efficacy to make contributions to their respective community (Demmert & Towner, 2003).

School leaders should be motivated by service and, when imperative for them to do so, take sensible risks (Martin, 2015). A school leader who exhibited high self-efficacy felt better about his or her overall contribution to the school and has persevered past setbacks to promote the longevity of career successes. In contrast to school leaders who exhibit high self-efficacy, those with low self-efficacy tended to lack skills that allowed them to not face challenges and facilitate changes they were tasked with. Low self-efficacy in school leaders contributes to the use of authoritarian methods to achieve institutional compliance, whereas the school leader tended to isolate themselves from school stakeholders (Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011). School leadership should be shared among all within the Pre K – 14 school systems, as essentially epistemological changes are critical to addressing curriculum and instruction, as these frameworks are responsible for the dissemination of knowledge into applicable skills. Often these schools

lowered expectations and diminished culture rather than making changes in curriculum and instruction (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010). *Piikani* leadership as a concept is not in line with authoritarian leadership practices as leaders were traditionally chosen due to his or her demonstrated efforts in support of the community, which served as the gradual development of individual capacities to assert leadership roles (Ladner, 2000).

In an analysis of Alaska Native school leaders, there exist three types of school leaders; the bureaucrat, the advocate, and the mediator. As a product of Westernized school leadership training, the bureaucrat's function is to preserve his or her own personal advancement and survival within the institution through the maintenance of existing systems that seek to reduce community variables and stifle change. The advocate is community-focused and his or her skills differ dramatically from bureaucratic practitioners due to his or her consorted motivation for maintaining the integrity of his or her school through cultural, legal, and political actions. As a form of leadership, the mediator blends methods in a bi-cultural approach to practice that is both integrative of Western and indigenous-based considerations for practice through the recognition of school standardization and community relevance (Barnhardt, 2015(b)). School leaders and teachers need to base decisions on the holistic assessment of learning for Indigenous students (Cajete, 1999). Although an eminent reality in education, assessment has spawned many forms that have severely compromised equity with Indigenous students. Therefore, it is incumbent upon school leaders to understand the intersections between both Western and Indigenous forms of student assessment, and determine which methods are ideal for which learning situation (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010).

The use of both Western and Indigenous sources or methods, as in this review of the literature, is intended to show the promise of leveraging both relevant sets of knowledge, referred to as "two-eyed seeing," into approaches that are intended to strengthen responses to Indigenous research questions, thus understanding the intersection of both as useful and collective, according to Mi'kmaw elder Albert Marshall. This is significant as there is not an extensive body of literature specific to Indigenous communities as it pertains to education or school leadership; therefore, it is essential that this project draw from other Indigenous research contexts that have been granted more attention such as health research (Martin, 2012). Until further research has been conducted in areas such as school leadership in Indigenous communities, practitioners will need to continue to draw from the strengths of both Western and Indigenous ways of knowing as the capacity to understand intersections, differences, and potential problems between the combined usage of both and the eventual knowledge development of culturally-specific sources or methods of school leadership.

## Review of the Literature

This literature review is organized to be integrative of specifically *Piikani* as well as other Indigenous sources blended into relevant non-Indigenous research concerning 1) values and their impact on school leadership, 2) best practices of effective school leaders, and 3) emphasis that Indigenous community approaches to school leader development are lacking. Prior research into school leadership is varied and is derived from predominately non-Indigenous inquiry into practices related to improving schools by providing quality

and relevant learning environments for Indigenous learners at all levels, and in the scope

of this project as a reflection of *Piikani* values. Values held by the school leader should

be transmitted into responsive guidance of practices and through his or her adherence to

integrating Indigenous culture and language into all facets of schools they lead. The

researcher, through the structure of this literature review, intends to demonstrate how

existing practices of school leadership coincide with *Piikani* values which are enacted by

generations of epistemological contributions and experiences. Each section is based on

the Blackfeet Education Standards' "The Hoop of Values" and includes the terms of

honesty, generosity, respect, spirituality, courage, humility, and compassion, the

"Markers of the Path of Life" (2005).

<div align="center">Honesty: Transparency, Communication, and Relational Trust</div>

A school leader is to instill within his or her school the overarching value of

fairness appropriated through modeling the treatment and expectations of others (Martin,

2015). As a school leader, it is essential to train, inform, and include boards as part of the

solution, especially when they are pushing an initiative or reform (Archambault, 2015). If

school leaders fail to provide board leadership with the tools they need to govern, then

they will not be able to ensure the cooperation and support of people who may find them

dishonest or not transparent (McDonald, 2015). Applying clear communication to

stakeholders at all levels, school leaders need to instill in teachers and staff members, the

confidence to encourage and support his or her role to productively perform his or her

job. This idea implies the importance of teachable moments when met with instances of failure where perseverance is critical to survival (Warner, 2015).

Unwavering support for school leadership among elected leadership is critically dependent on the alignment of the organization's best interests. Often the self-interests of elected leaders that keep them politically soluble in the community require a balanced as well as a truthful approach (Day, 2015). The school leaders' decisions have a profound impact on the school in relation to environmental factors pertaining to openness to the community and transparency toward stakeholders (Kelly & Petersen, 2011). Leaders in Indigenous communities inherently operate under various roles and responsibilities that demand them to be accountable and open, underscoring the importance and feasibility of his or her practices within the organization they serve (Lindquist, 2015).School leaders who create a positive school climate are always "visible," use proactive approaches that articulate expectations, and are recognized for their commitment to assisting students, teachers, and staff members (Kelly & Petersen, 2011) *Piikani* communication styles in particular are relational and exist in all contexts, therefore school leaders need to be open and balancing his or her time (Hernandez, 1999) and energy to relay information to stakeholders.  This emphasizes a school leader's ability to communicate well to accomplish goals (Bordeaux, 2015), highlighting limitations of Western linear communication as a structured and benign process that limits a school leader's interactions with community stakeholders and is only relevant within the context of the school (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010).

This idea is also reflected in school leaders being open and considerate toward community concerns (Agbo, 2007). This compelling argument challenges school leaders to place special efforts on being understandably truthful about the community they serve (Martin, 2015). Relationships exist as a way for *Piikani* leadership to govern and mitigate challenges without harming those around them.  This protocol has been established to protect the cultural integrity of the community (Ladner, 2000). School-based leadership and decision making is tied to building strong relationships with stakeholders which provides the leader with community-based leverage to improve learning for all students (Shield, 2004). School leaders who solicit stakeholder feedback need to use the information in ways that demonstrate how such information is used to inform leadership practices and school functions (Martin, 2015).

Cultural factors of the community's history, social conditions, and geographic location can help school leaders to understand the environmental contexts of those they serve (Knutson, Miranda & Washell, 2005; Tippeconnic, 2015). Community reality factored into assumptions about the community can help guide a school leader's definition of parameters and develop a more critical view while demonstrating a conscience effort to support the improvement of school functions and culture. Indigenous organizations need to practice reflective assessment as a part of integrating community culture and language into systems serving the community (Verbos, Kennedy & Gladstone, 2011). Additionally, school leaders have often failed to gain community insight regarding school curriculum, operations, and initiatives, further perpetuating inconsistencies in alignment of goals that may not be shared by the community

(Blakesley, 2008). As well, assessment perpetuates ineffective approaches despite continuous failures (Archambault, 2015). The school leader needs to combine his or her training and self-awareness (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) and utilize mentorship as a means to develop qualities that allow for them to effectively respond to challenges (Martin, 2015). A leader without followers is often due to a lack of trust, which is essential in encouraging others to endorse a shared vision (Warner, 2015).

The school leader who positions his or herself to valuing relationality in more intentional and formal ways is likely to promote organizational cohesion when establishing policies, procedures, and supportive operations (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015). Broader leadership skills are needed by school leaders as the changes they enact are in highly politicized environments; this idea emphasizes that a school leader's awareness of external impacts should allow them to make sense of how they apply internally to the school and community (Barnhardt, 2015(a)). If a school leader subscribes to stakeholder engagement for feedback it strengthens his or her response to the premise that the community assumes that they have the expertise to make decisions for an entire school system. These expectations are linked to bureaucratic conceptions that those selected to lead should, without question, be able to enact any change through organizational levels of authority (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015).

School leadership structures normally operate under a bureaucratic system of hierarchical levels of accountability, arguing that these systems cause leaders to appear disconnected from the community they serve (Serviovanni,1994). These organizational structures are often ineffective in providing stakeholders with the space they need to

provide for adequate input and contributions as from outside of the school according to (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015). Promoting the idea of school leadership development also requires building and utilizing reliable input structures to inform decision making toward the betterment of the school (Martin, 2015). School leaders who accept and integrate non-relevant practices are more likely to not meet community needs. Rather, they alienate themselves or diminish their reputation among stakeholders (Serviovanni, 1994). The integration of a diversity of perspectives along with the intentional involvement of stakeholders can help school leaders to collectively address decision making as a process that legitimizes community influence. School leaders, by virtue of their positions, will always need to consider alternative ideas, thus integrating change is more than just majority rules. The acquisition of knowledge from multiple sources should be an inherently positive endeavor that promotes the *Piikani* idea that individuals, through the development of their knowledge-base, should be able to put what they learn to use to overcome personal (and professional) circumstances (Hernandez, 1999). It is promoting the notion that all stakeholder ideas are critical in moving the organization forward through reform (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015).

<u>Respect: Stakeholder Engagement, Culturally-Responsive Schooling,</u>
<u>and Self-Determination</u>

Respect for the community and the knowledge that they bring, reinforces the support of the *Piikani* community toward the capacity of leadership to:

"…acknowledge[sic] the interrelationship of all beings as part of a single undifferentiated circle … [as] All life is related and all beings (particularly humans) have a responsibility for honoring those relations and the essence of all beings by developing an understanding of the natural order and their relationship to it…" (Ladner, 2000):

Expanding to an individual, in *Piikani* society, interrelationships are accepted as a part of the "circle of life" (Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992). Then, an individual can understand and call upon others to accept his or her own "obligations" to the collective culture and expectations of the community (Ladner, 2000). Indigenous student performance is better in schools that reflect the community culture (Nutbean, 2010). The educational process in regards to the *Piikani,* is a series of lifelong sacrifices to receive knowledge, achieve understanding, and build a sense of awareness as a contributor to the survival of the community (Hernandez, 1999). Students are influenced by relationships with all things, which conveys the primary vehicle for them to form opinions and perceptions based on experiencing learning through teachers and the support of school leaders (Ibrahum,1985). The notion of relationships has been critical in the emergence of traditional practices in Indigenous education and is necessary to maintain connections to one another (Cajete, 1999) and to use knowledge appropriately (Hernandez, 1999). For a school leader, the creation of an enabling structure within a school that allows teachers and other stakeholders to influence decision will inadvertently impact his or her individual capacities within the school (Wu, Hoy & Tarter, 2012).

Leaders should seek to create a positive school and working environment by developing an accommodating structure that ensures openness to the community and meaningful application of the culture into school functions. School leaders from the culture may also have higher mobility within Indigenous communities as they have been shown to have the greatest potential to be essential in school improvement efforts as long as school stakeholders are adequately included (Gipp, 2015). School reforms focusing on student achievement fall short with non-responsive, antiquated leadership styles because of the perpetual disconnect from community, asserting systemic practices that continue to paternalistically sabotage efforts related to school improvement (Barnhardt, 2015(b)).

School leaders need to enable sustained and reflective dialogue between stakeholders to develop the capacity to make needed reforms. It is through promoting the opportunities to allow for stakeholder feedback that behaviors are instilled from them that often promote the functionality of reflective and responsive schools (Sleeter, 2018). Community concerns aimed at a school reflect a lack of cultural inclusion, therefore listening and providing space for dialogue is critical in addressing pressing concerns of school leaders (Barnhardt, 2015(b)). It is critical that *Piikan*i leaders learn to listen prior to speaking, a behavior that exemplified a reciprocal awareness of the community and its needs (Hernandez, 1999) and relationships (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Community contexts surrounding the capacity of a school leader to act, means that it is his or her responsibility in his or her role to establish a climate that invites all learners, families, and the community in as stakeholders functioning in ways that strengthen the school's curriculum and response to student needs (Anuik, 2014). Parents can help school leaders

to collectively achieve goals and create a school climate of collective success (Martin, 2015). Improving schools requires a high-level of collaboration among stakeholders through sustained dialogue and the acknowledgment that collective commitments to the school will improve responses to educating community youth and accomplishing goals (Sleeter, 2018; Tippeconnic, 2015).

School leaders need to foster an environment for parents to be fully integrated into the education of their students (Agbo, 2007), by instituting intentional roles for parents in the education of students and by standardizing the use of parental input to improve school structure, policies, and the curriculum (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). School leaders who focuses on defining their expectations toward directing initiatives they undertake as evident when valuing parental input provides more leverage for them to see themselves as more active members of the school systems entrusted with student and community development (Agbo, 2007). When weighed in the *Piikani* context, community needs are seen as more important; therefore, values that are culturally specific to Indigenous groups do not reflect the values of non-Indigenous cultures, and are interpreted as separate or averse to the realities of the community development (Running Wolf, 1999). Individual student needs are important elements in defining educational goals and approaches to teaching reading, writing, mathematics, and especially history need to provide specific links to community culture (Blackmore, 2006).

Educational goals of Indigenous communities are best realized when students are provided with the opportunities, knowledge, and efficacy to make contributions through educational experiences linked to self-determination (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

Therefore, in order to achieve positive outcomes, schools must integrate cultural contexts that yield students to develop sustained skills to serve them well as they grow into contributing adults (Bordeaux, 2015). It is also known that various studies have concluded that Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS) practices have promise in improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students (Demmert & Towner, 2003). School leaders and teachers seeking to be more culturally responsive need to not resort to identifying specific subject areas to integrate CRP/CSP into, rather they should evaluate the connections between the community culture and all subject areas taught (Ginsberg, 2015). This also applies to the critical need to differentiate teaching strategies to meet the diverse cognitive and skill goals set for students (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). School leaders play a critical role in building a cohesive plan to engage stakeholders in making decisions impacting the school. Community contexts such as culture need to be understood by the school leader for them to properly advance a student focused agenda and be prepared to address community concerns. In addition, they also need to work with educators to ensure they, too, understand community contexts beyond the classroom (Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011), providing opportunities for "meaningful discourse" among all teachers (including non-Indigenous teachers), in order to effectively utilize his or her school's resources to support cultural revitalization through its intentional curricular integration (Demmert & Towner, 2003).

Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS) is the responsible way to reform schools serving Indigenous students, through the systematic evaluation of school curriculum, services, and operations for relevance to community culture. Culturally Responsive

Schooling (CRS) is used in this context as it applies to the entire school system (Brayboy & Castagno. 2009), and serves as the foundation for schools in Indigenous communities to develop Culturally Relevant Pedagogies (CRP) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (CSP) applying mainly to considerations for curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2014), instructional styles (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Sleeter, 2011), and teacher training (Banks, 2001; Gay, 2002; McCarty & Lee, 2014) to deliver relevant as well as culturally sustaining efforts in Indigenous schools (Martin, 2015). Community influence over school curriculum and operations is critical, and typical models being implemented in Indigenous schools are either assimilative and not integrative of the community or supportive of culturally responsive methods that bring the community into the schools (Saifer et al., 2005). Multicultural education scholars have advocated for CRS, CRP, and CSP that includes the presence of community ways of knowing into curriculum, instruction, and the school systems as a whole (Banks, 2001; Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2011), and the Blackfeet Reservation is by virtue impacted by its emerging multicultural identity (Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992). Drawing from these findings, it is indicated that the understanding of conditions and appropriate methods of Indigenous education has been greatly enhanced by the integration of culture and language as CRS has been shown to promote greater student motivation to learn, fewer disruptive behaviors, and reflect a more consorted commitment that places emphasis on how it can lead to school improvement (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). Indigenous schools nationwide struggle with improvement; therefore, the desire for a school leader to improve student learning outcomes has never been greater (Harchar, Trahan& Broussard, 2011).

The term "collective ecology" relates to and speaks to a larger purpose for educational settings to use culturally-responsive methods as a way to help educators provide educational experiences that assist students in developing cultural values and skills in preparation for adulthood. The integration of cultural values allows for the integration of "whole student" focuses that build on collective values to sustain "lifelong learning," as represented in traditional teachings (Cajete, 1999), and students appreciate his or her culture more when it emphasized in the educational journey (Fox, 2015). School leaders need to recognize that community cultural knowledge can be leveraged as an asset to school improvement efforts as they have the ability to inform models (Vogel & Rude, 2015) and methods that could be instrumental in facilitating reforms that optimize stakeholder knowledge (Martin, 2015) and as listening to stakeholders fosters partnership through engagement in school improvement efforts (Warner & Grint, 2015).

This is particularly true for school leaders in Indigenous communities who, by the virtue of their positions, are cultural leaders, who possess the special responsibility to help the school understand community cultural considerations and draw from cultural values to focus on gaining an authentic awareness of community (Bartone, 2015). One factor is family dynamics, which among the *Piikani* (Hernandez, 1999), family is the most important relationship (Running Wolf, 1999) and the community recognizes the family's influence on the youth (Pepion, 1999). Kinship considerations are also important to family dynamics (Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992); however, they should not be understood through Western interpretations or categories, but rather as the community defines relationships (Ladner, 2000).

School leaders accept situations that are not conducive with effective ways of involving communities in decision making. School leaders are responsible for the dissemination of the vision, which requires them to practice leadership that can allow all other stakeholders, including teachers, to be active participants in school improvement efforts (Lindahl, 2008). In the context of the community, experience and longevity of stakeholder relations can also provide information (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015), as expertise alone may not be enough to expand upon the *Piikani* idea that community oral stories provide context and mentoring opportunities that maintain congruency between one person's reality to another (Pepion, 1999). Adhering to the importance of oral story in the communication of community voices authenticate reality, so that when applied to education, it imparts sensitivity to community issues, demonstrates loyalty to the tribe, and is critical in maintaining the integrity of the culture (Bordeaux, 2015).School leadership involves providing opportunities to stakeholders to exercise leadership by integrating on-the-ground knowledge to inform decision making by forming structured learning communities that empower involvement at all levels (Knutson, Miranda & Washell, 2005). School leaders need to engage in dialogue that allows them to build capacity within his or her schools (Sleeter, 2018), to serve as nests for personal development and for the revitalization of culture and language (Running Wolf, 1999). However, youth participation is critical to achieve these goals (Hernandez, 1999).

School leaders impact every sector of an educational system (Kaak, 2011), thereby emphasizing the role of teachers, staff members, parents, and community stakeholders through contributions, have a profound impact on student's democratic

values that give students a voice to critically focus on how pedagogical approaches

impact learning experiences and social behaviors (Freire, 2007). If school leaders provide

the community with guidance, then the values will serve to connect the people to the

purpose of the school. School leaders are responsible for developing strategies that move

schools forward and address community concerns (Hernandez, 1999) and recognizing the

demand for interconnectedness among all stakeholders (and all things) (Long Standing

Bear Chief, 1992) should be a corner-stone of a "leadership platform" (Gleselmann &

Ruff (2015). This relates to the "collective ecology," which will exist in schools when

community culture is present and student's values are reinforced in curriculum and

organizational operations (Cajete, 1999). Culture and language considerations, if

thoughtfully integrated, need to be principally reinforced by the family and can determine

whether or not school leaders can feasibly integrate culture which is likely not going to

happen without community input and support. School leaders need to employ

professional courtesies toward families and be open to helping his or her students outside

of school as a show of leadership that fosters positive relationships (Agbo, 2007). School

leaders have the greatest control over the climate of the school, therefore getting into the

habit of inviting parents, families, and community members can lead to greater

confidence in the student's relationship with the school (Anuik, 2014).

A school leader, through consorted school and community interactions, supports

the notion that stakeholder feedback is undertaken to create a concise "balance" as to how

various sectors of the school and community can contribute to school improvement

reforms (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015). Valuing localized funds of knowledge encourages

the "self-determination" among community stakeholders, as schools create formative

processes to include community and cultural knowledge as a focus in the development of

new curriculum (Moll et al., 1992), recognizing that continuous improvement remains the

focus of any school leader (Martin, 2015). School leaders who are enablers to the

stakeholders are being more cognizant of their role in supporting the school and are not

normally recognized in school leadership development (Blakesley, 2008). Realistically

enabling others to contribute despite ability, status, and views is critical to community

cohesion (Ladner, 2000) and creating comprehensive stakeholder involvement and input

structures as evidence for how a school leader should act or react to challenges they face

(Martin, 2015). Leadership qualities and corresponding characteristics required are

evident in Indigenous education. Community-based innovations also have to be relevant

to mainstream ideas and methods of education that can be helpful in informing the

improvement of classroom instruction, assessment of learning, and active adherence to

school leadership research that promotes the use of best practices (St. Germaine, 2015).

Movement away from solely using mainstream ideas and methods has been

supported in Indigenous schools as a way to empower the community to help contribute

to needed changes in school curriculum and functions (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). These

conversations are generated by providing all stakeholders with the information they will

need to understand what is being undertaken (Archambault, 2015) as well as the rationale

behind it (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015). A substantial paradigm shift or an "alter-Native

approach" that adapts and learns from all stakeholders (Ladner, 2000) to de-centralize

decision making is integrative in devising rational changes though consensus,

compromise, and sustained involvement (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015). In the *Piikani*

context, there is an underlying notion that change is inevitable and that when it impacts

the community, consensus is valued (Running Wolf, 1999). School leaders need to

possess the ambition to enact stakeholder feedback by prioritizing reforms, by providing

an enabling structure while capturing interest to influence what affects them (Gleselmann

& Ruff, 2015), as well as using compromise as a tool when it has the potential to further

progress. Consensus among stakeholders compel the school leader needs to direct desired

reforms by sharing ownership of the school with the community (Martin, 2015).

### Generosity: Collective Commitments, Student-Centered Innovation, and Flexibility

Generosity is a revered trait among leaders and is applauded the more they are

committed to others needs (Bordeaux, 2015). *Piikani* values imply that each individual

has the duty and responsibility to share what they have with the community so they can

survive (Running Wolf, 1999). Thus, school leadership practices need to be refocused to

ensure student achievement aims are met, as traditional school leadership approaches

have had little or no measurable effect on improving schools (Martin, 2015). The

Blackfoot Confederacy has greatly influenced the study of human psychology, as it

profoundly changed the human behavior focus of Maslow (1938), after his formative

years as a researcher under Ruth Benedict from Columbia University. Benedict sent

Maslow and two other researchers to the *Siksika* Reserve in Alberta, Canada, where his

experiences would later be instrumental in defining his "Hierarchy of Needs" theory

(Heavy Head & Blood, 2013).

Psychological inquiry has long accepted the basis for Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" theory, in describing the conditions in which individuals, from the time they are born to as they progress to and through adulthood, granted that all physiological, safety, love/belonging, and self-esteem needs are satisfied, are enabled to self-actualize through "peak experiences" which is inadvertently tied to learning and personal development (Stone-Brown, 2014). Individual aspirations connected to the desire to belong are legitimized through the practice of values that can rally and garner community support (Running Wolf, 1999). The Blackfeet Education Standards (2005) meet expectations for helping stakeholders to understand his or her role in the education of each student in a unique tribally-specific framework. School leaders and others in education need to recognize that, in order to thrive, individuals must have basic needs (physiological needs) met before being able to function in a complex society.

Pre-colonial *Piikani* society reflected how individual responsibility to the collective was essential and became the basis for interactions embedded in the culture, language, and land base; thus, leadership skills and capacity evolve over time (Running Wolf, 1999). Teachings and traditions are transmitted from one generation to the next in *Piikani* society, which relates as receiving knowledge as a part of existing in our particular environment while interacting with all its elements (Hernandez, 1999). Politically and economically this notion was essential to hold the tribe(s) together and provided the basis for individual development by providing nourishment (physiological needs), protection (safety), ensuring strong family bonds (love/belonging), supporting personal aspirations (self-esteem), and realizing personal purpose (self-actualization).

The idea of a confederacy compelled leaders to extend individual skills beyond the reaches of the immediate community (Stone-Brown, 2014). Accordingly, the leaders should have been vested with a strong sense of personal responsibility toward all under such guidance, and remained connected through participation in ceremonies/society functions, contributed to the overall satisfaction of needs (Ladner, 2000), and encouraged the self-actualization of others (Stone-Brown, 2014).

The overall quality of a school involves its teachers and their ability to deliver appropriate instruction and learning strategies, which are by nature connected to how knowledge is acquired and mastered (Wu, Hoy & Tarter, 2012). Therefore, using student-centered approaches that keep in mind individual student learning needs and talents should be leveraged in the development of curriculum and the delivery of instruction to *Piikani* students (Pepion, 1999). The use of best practices has been shown to work among multiage groups of students (Halverson & Troby-Brown, 2011). No single strategy has been shown to effectively maintain student achievement through high-stakes testing; sustained improvements are dependent upon the school leader's longevity and experience, which equals "knowledge and skills." Indigenous students reared in tribal values can be closely tied to predictions of academic success and potentially in criterion-referenced testing (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). Student achievement indicators such as test scores, number of drop outs, or low attendance may be symptomatic of a school leader recycling antiquated ideas and practices, rather than creating or rebuilding initiatives with consideration for the diversity of student learning preferences (Kelly & Petersen, 2011). Educating *Piikani* students takes a considerable amount of personal initiative to

accomplish goals (Hernandez, 1999). Indigenous education reform has been made possible in many cases due to the emerging concept of transformational school leadership as opposed to conventional school leadership approaches. Students in these schools (primarily Indigenous) remarked that they "crave[ed]" the integration of local culture and language into the formal school setting (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010).

School leadership in the high-stakes standardized testing has been elevated by demands issued under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era laws, in which Indigenous schools were struggling to integrate culturally-responsive ways to engage Indigenous students to perform Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as measured by test scores only (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). With external pressures on school leaders to facilitate progress in student learning (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010), these schools are granted very little leverage in forming innovations that encourage equitable measures as they are pressured to systematically train teachers and re-invent strategies to meet student assessment requirements (Pollack & Zirkel, 2013). Therefore, schools resort to standardized programs and have developed very few strategies to accommodate students' individualized learning needs and often contribute to non-productive learning behaviors. School leader development is not just a professional endeavor; rather, it is tied to a personal investment in finding innovative ways to navigate potential challenges and possibilities combined to allow for innovation. It is grossly evident that school leadership programs only scratch the surface when it comes to addressing those practices in Indigenous schools (Martin, 2015). However, it is likely that no amount of training can fully prepare school leaders with the relevant skills that can only be obtained through

stories relating to sharing experiences (Archibald, 2015). Additionally, in schools serving

Indigenous students, school leadership practices are bereft of value-based approaches,

even if they reflect best practices in school leadership. The disconnect exists between

school leadership training programs at mainstream institutions and the developmental

integration of specific skills that are recognized best practices in Indigenous education

(Grayshield, Hurtado & Davis, 2015).

Although many educational models exist, researchers have not been able to

establish a shared leadership model to implement in all school contexts as local

perceptions of community culture can be instrumental in developing school leadership

capacity. This would allow any person within the organization to assume roles that they

can further influence school leader decisions. This, however, requires a shifting in

individual thinking to match community expectations. School leaders learn little outside

of experience when encountering the extent in which stakeholder influence should be

applied to certain school improvement efforts (Lindahl, 2008). School leadership should

encourage the development of many leaders among stakeholders to incorporate their

energies and expertise to develop a comprehensive framework for community-school

engagement (Curry, 2010). *Piikani* leadership requires a series of relationships that are

bonded by engagement where decisions do not resonate from a hierarchy but a collective

authority that called upon leaders to be responsive through the guidance of others in the

community (Ladner, 2008).

Progress in school improvement, accordingly, can be slowed due to shifts in

federal and state funding; such implications could leave schools without adequate

resources to accomplish already misdirected and lofty student achievement goals

(Beaulieu, 2015). This creates reliance on primarily federal fiscal support as currently the

only sustained source of funding available to most Indigenous educational reform and

cultural revitalization efforts, as tribes lack resources to invest in these initiatives

themselves and without federal support could not be sustained (Gipp, 2015). School

leaders need to, through his or her fiscal responsibilities and advocacy, relate the receipt

of resources to the accomplishment of goals and be transparent about how those

resources are allocated (Tippeconnic, 2015). School leadership's ability to plan and find

resources is a characteristic that positions them as an asset to the organization that can do

more because of diligent actions to obtain resources other than base funding (Bordeaux,

2015).

School leadership is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the school's

ability to accommodate for a variety of instructional delivery modalities through the

essential support of school infrastructure through its sustained enhancement of

curriculum and classroom technologies (Richardson & McLeod, 2011). This idea is also

supported and correlated to the interrelated relationship between relevant technology and

the integration of culture and language in Indigenous educational settings (Deloria &

Wildcat, 2001). This requires schools to institute methods that plan to compatibly

advance the use of technology, as students are continuously inundated by technology in

all facets of his or her lives. School leaders, through cognizant actions pertaining to

educational needs, need to be responsive to the importance of relevant instruction and up-

to-date technology applied to all levels of instruction (Prensky, 2005). Additionally,

curricular integration of cultural components as well as appropriate delivery methods can have a profound impact on student learning outcomes. The school leadership factor is only second of importance after classroom instruction in predicting the success of improvements related to student outcomes (Bordeaux, 2015).

Access to current technology-based pedagogical practices and equipment must be provided to ensure that instruction is relevant to advance students' skills to meet the demands of a changing world. Advances in technology are ever changing and expensive; therefore, school leaders need to ensure that school resources are leveraged to promote current technology attainments and upgrades (Richardson & Mcleod, 2011). School cohesion for community culture enables for advancements in the technological capacities of students, teachers, staff, parents, and community members, details the need for technology to be utilized in ways that advance student learning and mastery (Prensky, 2005). *Piikani* leadership experiences, by virtue of the role, have always enabled the people to realize personal potential and the ability to construct solutions and adapt to changes while remaining relevant in whatever context they are functioning under (Ladner, 2000). Learning without context or relevant application is not respecting cultural frameworks that could be used to inform institutional needs and often times teaching as well as learning strategies require more information to determine school effectiveness (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010). School leaders require the resources to carry out initiatives through personal and professional development which will allow them to foster learning communities among educators, encouraging them through the modeling of behaviors such as collegiality and mentorship (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). In the case of all

stakeholders, school leaders need to support individuals to be responsive and feel responsible through mentoring that supports his or her growth and contributions (Martin, 2015).

Schools appear by many as a critical element in community cultural and language revitalization efforts (Barnhardt (2015(a)).Therefore, using symbolism and cultural characteristics can help to articulate stakeholder's institutional purposes, which provides organizations that reflect community values and norms with relevant tactics to support improvement goals (Ledoux, 2005) and relates the need for flexibility of learning expectations noting that all individuals are unique and have a variety of learning styles not typically addressed in conventional teaching methods (Hernandez, 1999). Indigenous communities are unique and hold distinct concepts that epitomize the complicated nature in navigating time and place in these communities. This calls upon communities and the structures that serve to re-think the perpetuation of inflexible regimentation that conflicts with tribal community nuances (Verbos, Kennedy & Gladstone, 2011). Ceremony as a component of learning is not an event that can be confined to time and space (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001); however, for the *Piikani*, all things will occur as they unfold, rather than the way people would prefer they happen. Ceremonial elements retain the quality of learning in a natural and meaningful way that is responsive to personal needs and abilities (Hernandez, 1999); however, prayer outside of ceremony is not prescribed, rather it is a personal demonstration of faith giving thanks or recognizing a higher power in times of need (Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992)

Culture and geography are the two most important elements in how Indigenous communities have developed over time to ensure survival. Time is also constructed by how the community relates to places, circumstances, and resources; therefore, humanity has to be flexible to accommodate external forces and circumstances that impact the community (Verbos, Kennedy & Gladstone, 2011).Many families and communities continue to obtain sustenance from the natural world, which means schools need to accommodate these factors into scheduling and planning so that students do not fall behind due to family or community obligations (Barnhardt, 2015(a)). Learning expectations should provide flexibility in how each individual achieves and be related to *Piikani* protocols often as a measure for consistency in practices that, in order to remain relevant, continuously adjust to suit survival of traditions and customs (Hernandez, 1999). School leadership involves the development of personal and professional maturity which occurs over a long period of time (Forkenbrock, 2015). The longer a school leader has the capacity, the larger impacts he or she can have on the organization, as well as the school leader being recognized for his or her contributions to the school (Pease, 2015).

Compared to other cultures, Indigenous groups tend to exist in a non-linear and flexible environment where traditional Westernized institutional structures experience adverse circumstances that can cause them to stifle community involvement and student achievement (Barnhardt, 2015(b)). One of the continuous, non-compartmentalized approaches to education that schools serving Indigenous communities should embrace is to be more community oriented and accepting of cultural norms. Public schools may be the most difficult system, as the presence of Western time orientation and regimentation

is standard (Verbos, Kennedy & Gladstone, 2011). The *Piikani* concept of time is non-linear and multi-dimensional; therefore, it is incumbent upon individuals within that space to recognize the variables related to the imposition of regimentation in conflict with community reality (Hernandez, 1999). School leaders in Indigenous communities should draw from cultural values and qualities to implement things that accommodate flexibility and openness to the community (Bartone, 2015).

The school leader is recognized as the most important element in reforming schools, as he or she focuses his or her energy and professional development to build the school's learning infrastructure and improving them in ways that increase the likelihood of intended student learning outcomes (Kelly & Petersen, 2011). Individual school leaders integrating his or her own distinct worldview and cultural lens will help to challenge mainstream applications, tools, or measures that have dominated school improvement methods. The imposed assessment methods used to measure student learning has been dismissive of Indigenous epistemologies that include the acquisition of knowledge that diminishes personal capacity to perform well on conventional standardized assessments (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010). Increased efforts to measure student achievement and school improvement has again de-emphasized the importance of culture and language in schools serving ethnic majorities with cultures distinct from the mainstream, as these standardized approaches are applied to describe student learning outcomes in these communities (Singh, 2011).

School leaders need to confidently manage a variety of functions and responsibilities over entire organizations. Therefore, self-efficacy is very important to

maintaining professional successes and to support self-sufficiency among students,

teachers, and staff members (Archambault, 2015). Leaders, through the recognition of the

power in all things as perpetual variables in affecting his or her practices (Deloria &

Wildcat, 2001), should understand how they are inter-dependent and connected to

personal efforts of being in service to the community (Ladner, 2000). Clashes between

personal and organizational values often occur because school leader's responsibilities

are broad and his or her scope of work may become unclear if others in the organization

fail to act; it then falls on the leader to resolve and ensure accountability (Tippeconnic,

2015).

### Spirituality: Personal Integrity, Self-Sustaining Practices, and Ceremony

Spirituality and the relationships that sustain its utilization are what form the

foundation for the *Piikani* worldview; therefore, Indigenous concepts of school

leadership are a spiritual reflection of "place," in that a "sense of place" is an innate

connection to rich cultural traditions that knowledge is transferred through landscapes

(Hernandez, 1999). These landscapes further frame "place" as an orientating factor in

forming paradigms needed to drive school leadership practice. "Place", like the role

entrusted to a school leader, is "sacred" in the eyes of the community (Deloria & Wildcat,

2001). Consequently, cultural values reflect a sacred and spiritual obligation to society

(Warner & Grint, 2015). Knowledge is recognized by the community (Deloria, 1973),

especially as an individual *Piikani* who may receive various transfers of cultural

knowledge throughout his or her lifetime as a way of bringing out in an individual the

self-agency needed to recognize responsibilities (Hernandez, 1999). It is through spiritual

teachings that these values become the foundation (Running Wolf, 1999) for the

formation of worldview that connects personal ambition to community perseverance

(Little Bear, 2000). Bordeaux relates the triangular array of philosophies, protocols, and

values as it relates to a leader's practice and corresponds to a desire to practice "spiritual

leadership" as a guiding principal in mitigating community challenges, as this idea

emphasizes the role of spirituality in Indigenous leadership (Bordeaux, 2015).

   To the *Piikani*, a spiritual relationship is critical in the acceptance of an

individual's roles and responsibilities in the community and provides both fortification

and an outlet for survival (Hernandez, 1999) It is also true that spiritual differences, too,

are to be respected (Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992). Personal beliefs also dominate the

discussion around self-efficacy and successful school leadership which is at the

foundation of projecting intended goals for students through the purposeful

implementation of character education as a corner-stone of the education of Indigenous

students. Providing students with opportunities to learn culturally-relevant character

education concepts will provide context for school leaders, teachers, and staff members

for the importance of interpersonal relationships, collaboration, and the need for

increased self-efficacy to improve the likelihood of being successful with students. When

school leaders operationalize character education into practice, it creates school-wide

functions that expect all members of the school community (especially among teachers

and staff members) to practice and promote cultural values (Tatman, Edmonson & Slate,

2011) that enhance personal growth and welfare of students (Day, 2015; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

The importance of personal spiritual beliefs is becoming the basis for which values can be integrated into what characterizes as a commitment to personal integrity (Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992), which yields to responsive professional practices (Martin, 2015). Personal family values (and beliefs) of school leaders are the foundation for individual's connection with the community expectations (Bordeaux, 2015). Committing oneself to enlightenment is in line with the assertion that spirituality contributes heavily to whom a leader becomes and if they have the fitness to commit themselves to be at the will of the people (Ladner, 2000).A leader as such maintains the importance of personal faith as it pertains to learning and the environment in which these experiences holistically develop individual capacities for growth (Pepion, 1999).Healing spiritually is critical for those in leadership who have encountered traumas or tragedies and relates to subscribing to traditional practices to maintaining personal strength in the face of adversity (Lindquist, 2015). Ceremonial practices are opportunities for these individuals to interact with the Creator to ask for knowledge and tools to overcome challenges and reinforces values and transfer of responsibilities (Ladner, 2000). Knowledge and teaching are both rooted in spirituality and in the context of Indigenous and *Piikani* education: they are not to be treated as separate or as if distinct from the reality of the learner and community (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Pepion, 1999).

Ceremony and prayer, although a contentious issue in public education, should, as articulated, be used in every learning environment and should enable the individual's

strength to serve (Hernandez, 1999; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992; Pepion, 1999).

Learning from ceremony is critical to establishing a congruent worldview and enacting

*Piikani* leadership (Gladstone & Pepion, 2016); it is also important that individuals attend

these ceremonies by expressing a sincere interest in learning from them (Long Standing

Bear Chief, 1992). Ceremonial teachings among the *Piikani* rely upon the maintenance of

bundles that provide spiritual balance between natural world and the people. For this

reason, it is essential that *Piikani* leadership be integrative of these practices (Gladstone

& Pepion, 2016). For the *Piikani*, the leader is stationed in a role coined as "spiritual

stewardship" over the people they serve and influence. As always evident throughout

*Piiikani* history (Hernandez, 1999), leadership often suffered and continue to suffer great

losses in his or her capacities, therefore it is important to leverage spirituality to create

balance (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) and harmony in preparation as well as coping which

teach resiliency to overcome challenges and grow culturally (St. Germaine, 2015).

Spiritual values are the operational internal force that ensures survival, as lessons learned

from the natural world and its elements are true when applied to struggles for tribal self-

determination (Barnhardt, 2015(a)) and places special emphasis on praying for others in

times of strife or conflict (Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992).

The strength of an individual will be continuously tested in capacities in service to

the community, signaling a need for spiritual guidance as helpful to constructing

strategies for overcoming challenges. Leadership within the *Piikani* context, has

throughout history been a heavy yet necessary burden that requires the use of spirituality

to maintain direction as well as clarity when making decisions that impact the community

(Hernandez, 1999). As personal endeavors are subject to conflict and challenges beyond any one person's immediate control, values are essential in maintaining compatibility between self and the parameters that directly enable his or her practical skill application (Running Wolf, 1999). Individual use of spirituality is fundamental to a leader's repertoire as guidance will be sought throughout being in the capacity of leading others and accomplishing goals (Gladstone & Pepion, 2016). A school leader's personal and professional commitments should reflect how his or her observance of the culture and its influences over individual spiritual beliefs that direct actions and leadership practices (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Martin, 2015).

## Courage: Self-Efficacy, Bravery, and Sacrifice

*Piikani* leadership is averse to typical models such as power and authority (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001), characteristics that are foreign concepts that have done little to help through the mitigation of conflict and the protection of tribal resources (Pepion, 1999). Furthermore, in the *Piikani* context, abuses of power automatically allow for negativity to take over discussions when words are uttered, as the leader's attitude takes hold, as the things that they give life to or create can have grave consequences; therefore, it is essential that leaders protect the learner and community from negative outcomes (Hernandez, 1999).When leaders choose to resort to negative tactics to achieve something, the outcome is likely to affect relationships that they will need to form initiatives and garner buy-in from others (Warner, 2015). School leaders who subscribe to positive thinking, no matter how challenging it might be, accordingly, can be

instrumental in inspiring others who may feel negativity toward the system, to becoming more active in improving it (St. Germaine, 2015).

Courage to lead a school means modeling leadership for stakeholders while seeking solutions to chronic challenges. As schools gravitate toward methods that provide space for community dialogue through reciprocal interactions to emerge, leaders are called to facilitate change among diverse groups (Sleeter, 2018). School leaders need to further the capacity for these groups to enhance student access to innovative practices that do not limit Indigenous communities, culture, language, and knowledge-base (Kaak, 2011). School leader best practices should not be based solely on his or her environment, remote locations, and cultural uniqueness. Commitment has to go beyond practice and needs to emphasize ideological growth upon educators to promote open systems where all students have access to educational programs and resources (Blakesley, 2008). Assimilation as used as a tool for cultural destruction was unsuccessful. The use of these tactics persists, despite being proven ineffective or irrelevant in nature and has perpetuated traumas, rather than prevent them (Running Wolf, 1999). However, it is important to note that most school leaders will need to find ways to integrate both methods, as a response to external reform pressures and community needs. Most public schools participate in high-stakes testing to determine measures for student achievement primarily in basic skills. However, no concrete evidence supports the use of proficiency and mastery programs in Indigenous schools. Research suggests that the intentional and systematic use of both Indigenous and Western tools is critical for school leaders to feasibly measure student performance and success (Barnhardt, 2015(a)).

A leadership paradigm shift toward accountability and improvement has resulted in many strategies that have not gained desired results in Indigenous communities (Beaulieu, 2015). The need for school leaders to develop new approaches to assist in the improvement of schools in the United States is at a critical juncture, as Indigenous schools have been recognized for reforms that in effect have systematically demonstrated few gains in Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era laws. New changes at current are pending with the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA for the first time places substantial emphasis on school equity through emphasizing local control and tribal consultation in education planning around student and school development These mandates place a substantial focus on the capacity of the school leader to engage educators and other stakeholders to assist communities in defining success by re-thinking what Indigenous student achievement means (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2017).

Thoughts are emerging concerning the use of standardized approaches in Indigenous communities, and have determined that they are not the answer to encourage student achievement and readiness. Indigenous schools, by emphasizing that students are to be equipped to mitigate student, personal (and eventually professional) challenges, by positioning themselves in the community to be mindful of their own needs, skills, and development. It is paramount for Indigenous students, by experiencing and building a keen awareness of their surroundings to make connections between knowledge learned and skill application, as they assume post-educational roles in the community. Such cases exist of the replication of mainstream strategies from one successful school to another,

where very little evidence supports one method or standardized approach that ensures

school improvement (Barnhardt (2015(a)). With a shift in thinking, it is also essential for

school leaders to experience a shift in consciousness to be able to positively respond to

the needs of the students and the community (St. Germaine, 2015). In the *Piikani* context,

leadership is not without the burden of accepting community obligations. This is essential

to understanding his or her role in the community (Hernandez, 1999).

For Indigenous schools that are far removed from the mainstream both culturally

and geographically (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001), it is incumbent upon the school leader to

introduce as well as promote the use of skills, innovations, and emerging best practices

that enhance and do not limit curricular capabilities (Blakesley, 2008) to ensure that

students are able to apply imagination and/or creativity in the learning environment and

processes that ensure success, despite differences, such as ability, age, or gender

(Hernandez, 1999). In *Piikani* society, women maintain active roles in leadership, which

enables them to be active forces in family and community development (Gladstone &

Pepion, 2016; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992). *Piikan*i women culturally are positioned

with extensive social mobility where they can assume roles outside of euro-centric

constructions of femininity. This has enabled the *Piikani* community to persevere due to

women assuming leadership through both formal and informal means, thus

acknowledging the duality of both genders in defining individual obligations to the

collective (Ladner, 2000; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992).

School leadership cognition of the importance of shared governance and political

considerations can conflict directly with existing organizational structures and norms

(Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Sleeter 2018). Organizational and community (primarily

tribal government leaders) leadership structures have to be understood by leaders from

the tribal perspective, as Western political structures contain characteristics that place

little emphasis on values and what constitutes as "consensus" (Ladner, 2000).

Additionally, school leaders need to be aware that the education of the community is

entrusted to them and is often a low priority for tribal leaders, as they are dealing with an

enormity of tasks that impact all constituents, not just school stakeholders and may not

appear focused or interested. School leaders need to develop and foster good working

relationships with community stakeholders through the identification of individual and

collective contributions to define plans and processes to include particular groups when

needed (Tippeconnic, 2015).

　　　As political organizations, teacher unions can pose formidable challenges for

school leaders in addressing needed reforms as they directly impact working conditions

and responsibilities to students. Therefore, it is imperative that school leaders work hard

to address barriers in order to effectively accomplish reform goals compelling school

leaders to overcome institutional barriers that inhibit the accomplishment of this task

(Nutbean, 2010). Indigenous communities are mostly far removed from the mainstream,

which makes promoting the influence of culture and language both possible and

challenging (Blakesley, 2008). However, external and internal pressures often demand

"quick fixes" or a new program to be implemented, many of them not conducive to the

needs of cultural integration (Martin, 2015).The Blackfeet Education Standards (2005)

are an initial attempt to align the *Piikani* education system with community expectations

and as a tool for cultural practicality and to articulate diverse, yet interconnected "realms" that define community-based interactions which allow for social cohesion and sharing of knowledge (Archibald, 2015). Through community-based relationships, school leaders can both thrive and drive the transitions relevant to needed changes and impart on stakeholders, the professional abilities that will sustain such actions (Sleeter, 2018). Shared commitments among stakeholders can provide a social justice minded leader to call for the congruency of community and social needs as well as the integration of cultural values into school functions (Shield, 2004).Since the Meriam Report (1928), there have been numerous calls for Indian education reform in the United States; each new study, legal remedy, and/or law created by Congress has done little to act upon consistent themes evident in every timeframe of Indigenous education in the United States (Gipp, 2015).

For leaders, "sacrifice" is an essential component in their practices (Hernandez, 1999). The experiences gained throughout an individual's career (or lifetime) provide him or her with lessons (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) that have allowed the *Piikani* to persevere in leadership roles that have a direct impact on the community (Hernandez, 1999). Community influence in Indigenous schools is a response to increased activism among school leaders, professionals, parents, and students demanding an equitable education and has been responsible for moving schools forward with the guidance of the community. Activism has set the tone for Indigenous educational reform and has built the resilience of Indigenous communities not being afraid to speak up (Beaulieu, 2015). This is also true for students insisting that the educational process has to equip them to

exercise resilience as a factor of academic success (Day, 2015). Social activism in

Indigenous education has been an important factor in tribes being successful in asserting

their sovereignty (St. Germaine, 2015).

An individual in leadership should use his or her power and/or authority to benefit

individual development, community need, and tribal sovereignty. Throughout *Piikani*

post-colonial history, leadership as practiced has been continuously subject to euro-

centric bias, which has at times undermined and manipulated preferred leadership styles

rendering contemporary leaders ineffective (Ladner, 2000).School leaders need to take on

challenges that allow them to articulate for others the importance of integrating culture

and language, a principal component of developing practices that improve student

learning outcomes (Tippeconnic, 2015).Individuals need to be oriented to the high level

of commitment required to serve Indigenous communities (Deloria, 1973).The

preservation of the *Piikani* worldview is incumbent upon the individual awareness that

comes with recognizing when it is time for each to act and take his or her place within the

circle as a leader to build on what has been accomplished by each passing generation

(Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992; Gladstone & Pepion, 2016).

Humility: Humor, Professional Growth, Shared Governance, and Mentorship

*Piikani* leadership was assumed by people who, many times, were themselves

"self-actualized," (Heavy Head & Blood, 2013) in the sense that they retained humble

qualities and values (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001), meaning they did not see themselves as

superior over others; rather, they modeled and fostered the same desire for everyone they

served. "Self-actualization" is a trait that connects community reality (need) with aspirational traits (Stone-Brown, 2014) wherein is recognized the enormous task of a school leader to sacrificing personal ambition for community services that seek to enable the community to sustain the land and resources (Warner & Grint, 2015), and communicates that they care for his or her people (St. Germaine, 2015; Gipp, 2015), encouraging school leaders to exhibit the type of leadership that they want to encourage among those they serve (Kaak, 2011). Leaders operate under patterns that create the consistency needed to guide processes in respect to the community (Hernandez, 1999).

The bureaucratic nature of school structure does little to improve school systems as they are often at the root of continuous inconsistencies of organizational responses to supporting student learning (Wu, Hoy & Tarter, 2012). Bureaucratic leaders, although a result of perpetuated and continuous systems, have a strong orientation to control. Therefore, it is likely that these individuals are inclined to inflict abuses of power or stifle changes to suit existing frameworks. Communities who are subject to rigid management structures, especially in schools, often do not feel they are a part of the system (Warner, 2015). For the *Piikani*, leaders modeled accepted behaviors and possessed traits that gained respect as they demonstrated his or her commitment as a precursor to personal and community success (Hernandez, 1999). School leaders recognizing the quality of their practices provide for them important insight into developing qualities that enable the functionality of leadership (Martin, 2015) when granted the space to learn from their own mistakes (Horse, 2015). When leaders lack commitment to improving his or her own practices, he or she is seen as ripe for failure, which is not an acceptable option for

anyone involved with Indigenous education (Forkenbrock, 2015).It is through the individual gifts that leaders possess that develop into behaviors that maintain solid relationships and build upon personal commitment to serving the *Piikani* community (Ladner, 2000).Indigenous leaders need to set the example they wish to convey and act as role models to others as a way to practice and encourage adherence to value systems (Bordeaux, 2015).However, it is important to note that school leaders need to practice a consorted level of restraint when acting as they will be called upon frequently to mitigate challenges that are out of his or her immediate control (Vogel & Rude (2015).

For the *Piikani*, the concept of "elder" when applied to leadership is not the same as the western understanding that individuals at any point of his or her life can demonstrate the knowledge and wisdom which is granted to them through interactions with the community and the recognition of his or her competency to lead (Hernandez, 1999). Elder mentorship is critical in Indigenous school leadership development and can provide the most assistance in improving personal and professional areas of concern that could undermine his or her ability to lead if gone unchecked (Ackley-Christensen, 2015). Elder or seasoned leaders need to mentor and support new leaders into assuming leadership roles that build upon what has been accomplished (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Horse, 2015). Mentorship, especially in cases of novice or non-experienced leaders, is critical in the early years of assuming positions to reflectively and proactively grow into accepting such a responsibility (St. Germaine, 2015). Mentorship, particularly when enacted by a school leader, is most effective when the relationship developed between the mentee and mentor demonstrate reciprocal willingness to dedicate time in understanding

which qualities enhance situational awareness (Hernandez, 1999) and optimizes the likelihood of them developing responsive solutions.

Experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous school leaders differ dramatically in the areas of expectations, the extent of their community relationality, and cultural fitness to perform reforms that are based in epistemological considerations of the community. The scope of a leader's power and influence is derived from numbers of followers with whom he or she has been entrusted to lead (Day, 2015). In turn, leaders work to ensure the survival of those they serve. Along the same lines, *Piikani* leadership's chief, band, and society structure serves as testament to the influence needed to perform leadership in situations (Jardine, 2007; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992) that are among people who could freely choose to not follow them or part from the band under current leadership at his or her own discretion, a defiant behavior still present in community dynamics (Ladner, 2000).Parents and community members alike have instilled beliefs in future generations that schools are symbols of colonization and assimilation. This explains why Indigenous students rebel and demonstrate behaviors that limit thier likelihood of academic success, in spite of the system entrusted to educate them (Agbo, 2007).

Differences of opinion that equate to a school leader being vilified, should be considered or seen as a legitimate concern to be addressed in a collective manner to enrich conversations in which reforms will emerge(Wu, Hoy & Tarter, 2012).School leaders who encourage collegiality among teachers and staff allow each person within the organization to be mindful (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009) and allow for other's needs,

contributions, and their individual charismatic leadership capacities to improve and promote sustained efforts and continuous reflection (Ladner, 2000). Evaluating school leadership in Indigenous communities needs to reflect community reality as a guide to defining day-to-day responsibilities and to identify for the school leader ways for him or her to humbly and holistically assess student and school performance (Ackley-Chistenson, 2015) as his or her role also involves continuously engaging in the community beyond the walls of the school (Martin, 2015).

In leading reforms, school leaders need to appropriately delegate and distribute tasks among primary and secondary stakeholders (Martin, 2015). "Knowledge" provides school leaders with the cultural insight they need to conduct effective reforms within Indigenous educational contexts which speaks to the level of preparation and or/professional development required to participate in the focused development of teachers (Krumm, 1996). *Piikani* leaders are often called "chief," (Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992) a term, although adopted by the *Piikani*, which is a Western democratic construction in which recognizable traits, not values, are perpetuated by authoritarian trends in relations with tribes (Gladstone & Pepion, 2016). Politically linked to the community, school leaders need to be well aware and astute to understanding community power structures (Martin, 2015), which describe how the weight of decisions they make can ultimately render them ineffective if sectors of the community disagree (Blackmore, 2006).

Cultural values have historically been diminished and taken out of practical context, which has led to many complications concerning student attendance, retention,

and achievement. Therefore, educational models or strategies used cannot create barriers

for the students they serve (Krumm, 1996). Personal characteristics have often dominated

the inquiry around leadership. School leader's actions and acceptance of others can

contribute greatly to the overall health and security of the school, as these factors

encourage academic optimism and efficacy among individuals who share common values

that influence student achievement (Gurol & Kerimgil, 2010). Additionally, it is apparent

that leaders, with their power and influence, all share a vulnerability to succumb to

unethical behavior which has the potential to progressively undermine professional

effectiveness (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) and personal reputation as they break the trust

the community has placed in them (Running Wolf, 1999).

Individual family patterns, norms, and values contribute to the formation of

personal identity (Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992) to allow for the alignment of personal

aspirations to meeting the community's needs (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). These values,

although not recognized as being widely practiced, have to an extent been retained and

are residual, despite family and community circumstances. However, it is apparent that

complexities exist as we demonstrate that the imposition of *Piikani* values will help to

promote accepted behaviors among all that the community serves, particularly from

leaders (Running Wolf, 1999). Leaders need to be in good health and support others by

modeling behaviors that increase the likelihood of his or her effectiveness and need to be

cognizant of personal limitations and abilities (McDonald, 2015). Leadership's impact on

the community's health and welfare also needs to be considered, as traumas in

Indigenous communities are frequently repeated and as a result of decisions made for the

people (Day, 2015). Through the promotion of personal expertise within the school and from the community, such efforts are an effective way to address changes where school leaders do not have experience or expertise to make a decision alone (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015). It is clear that the longevity experienced of sustained stakeholder relations provide information that expertise alone cannot (Southworth & Du Quesnay, 2005). Creating the space to act upon stakeholder feedback should complement the school reform process with the understanding that the school leader can learn to improve his or her response, if contributions are requested (Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011).

The personality of the leader has to be positioned in a way that can reasonably navigate the complexities associated with his or her role (Running Wolf, 1999) and identifies that being humble as an equalizer when accepting the community as a source of knowledge, is a process that can span a lifetime (Hernandez, 1999). Leaders should not boast or talk about one's accomplishments: this is typically not a preferred Indigenous trait, as those who are deserving of praise will receive it from the community and to a larger extent, from individual families (Horse, 2015).Accepting stakeholder input requires school leaders to consider all ideas, even if they do not agree, as an example of fostering rationale for changes to form unified responses to challenges (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015).School leaders need to accept the challenge to manage a diversity of contemporary characteristics typical of *Piikani* families, in that the reality is that many are single parents; many live in multi-generational/extended family circumstances; families are often blended and can be comprised of a multitude of racial identities (Running Wolf, 1999; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992).

Compassion: Situational Awareness, Responsiveness, and Commitment

A high-level of restraint is needed by a school leader and others within the school, especially when it is human nature to form conclusions and assumptions that do not always equate to them showing compassion. Individuals should be supported based on current situations or other factors that may inhibit their performance or dependability in a school setting (Gipp, 2015). As motivation is needed to learn or work, societal factors have incentivized this trait assuming that individual actions are generally contributing to the community. However, through the promotion of individual personal development over community-influenced personal development, it creates levels of economic security and insecurity in communities that are already impoverished. Western educational models have dominated Indigenous learning in ways that impede progress in already depressed situations (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) through the de-emphasis of community connectedness (Stone-Brown, 2014). As Indigenous communities were transformed by colonization and a profound loss of cultural identity (Hungry Wolf, 1980), therefore the ability to sustain themselves and promote equitable changes to ensure that children will be provided the tools to "self-actualize" were severely limited (Stone-Brown, 2014).While operating in a vastly different society from his or her own, the challenge in education is to provide for individuals what they need by granting them with sufficient access to schools that address all components of equity, including disparities in leadership structure, pedagogical considerations, and institutional capacity building to sustain changes (Pollack & Zirkel, 2013).

School leaders struggle to maintain longevity within the schools they serve. This is also the case for the teachers they direct (Southworth & Du Quesnay, 2005), as continuous professional development for new school leaders and teachers is a consistent reality in education (Ruff & Shoho, 2001). School leaders often need to incrementally address the needs of novice teachers and staff to best reinforce both cultural and academic goals of his or her institution. When educator training is geared at practicing cultural proficiency as a cornerstone for his or her educational approach to integrating his or her own situational awareness into school improvement efforts, the likelihood that they will succeed in a particular context is higher when encouraged by school leaders (Singh, 2011).The term "situational leadership" pertains to how *Piikani* leaders, imparting his or her decisions, impact the community as well as weighing feasible options in sometimes uncertain times (Ladner, 2000).School leader's communication style should be seen through the lens of social justice and be cognizant of community needs to encourage changes in mindsets that do not align to community values (Agbo, 2007).This level of cognition is being openly considerate of stakeholder viewpoints as they pertain to school improvement and clarity with expectations of such efforts (Blackmore, 2006). Furthermore, decisions made by a compassionate leader, popular or not, impact them on a personal level but should enable them to stand by what they decided without regret (Tippeconnic, 2015).

Schools are not immune to the impact of poverty on the community; in fact, students are directly impacted by factors vastly out of his or her control, yet school leaders (as well as teachers and staff members) are held accountable for academic

preparation of students when resources or conditions at home do not adequately meet his

or her most basic needs. The leader must change to suit the needs of the community in

order to remain a relevant sector for promoting personal development of all learners and

is vital to building on individual economic capacities to contribute to the families of the

community. School leaders, teachers, and staff members alike have exhibited difficulty in

defining what cultural competency is, as in the case of students, imparts the recognition

of his or her lived reality and respective educational needs (Singh, 2011).

A perpetual shift in the school valuing the impact of parents and community

influence will also encourage more confidence in systems that educate students,

especially in instances of poverty, where student optimism for learning is linked toward

improving current situations. As families and community dynamics are ever-present

(Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992), it is critical for schools to begin to provide assistance

beyond the classroom. Leaders need to recognize that the *Piikani* family is, and has been

for the last century, affected adversely by this phenomenon and the community is subject

to high-rates of substance abuse and other domestic disturbances that disable parents and

families from collectively providing the most basic needs and values for future

generations to thrive. *Piikani* family structure, despite conditions or situations, has

adapted to be a critical component in providing security and tools for survival when

impacted by inter-generational trauma (Running Wolf, 1999). Previous educational

experiences of parents, grandparents, and other relations have inadvertently impacted

overall student attitudes and often the perceptions of schools and the individuals who

work there (Agbo, 2007). Typical school leadership practices are defined by euro-centric

power structures and have built systems that have failed to alleviate social injustice

among Indigenous populations (Blakesley, 2008).

## Literature Review Summary

*Piikani* values are relevant factors that can guide school leaders to encourage

greater cohesion among the school, the community, and its stakeholders. Values correlate

to actionable behaviors that impart upon practitioners the importance of honest

transparency, sound communication, and developed rationality among those involved in

the education of *Piikani* students. Stakeholder engagement involves a critical shift to

enact tribal self-determination practices such as Culturally-Responsive Schooling (CRS).

These practices enable student-centered innovations that generously allow for flexibility

to strengthen collective commitments among stakeholders that school leaders can

leverage to encourage school improvements and student achievement. *Piikani* leadership

practices and connections to spirituality breathe life into encouraging personal and

professional integrity among school leaders, who in turn are provided additional fortitude

to overcome challenges using self-sustaining approaches, which in the *Piikani* context

means participating in ceremony. The school leaders are enabled by their own self-

efficacy and bravery to demonstrate sacrifices, unveiling an internal courage to assume

school leadership roles. *Piikani* school leadership, as evidence of the importance placed

on humility, is a process that provides experiences to enhance personal and professional

growth, through shared governance interactions as well as assuming mentorship roles to

build firm understanding in others to act. In conclusion, the literature is clear that school

leaders of *Piikani* schools require keen observance of situational awareness to community reality to encourage responsive and compassionate measures that highlight his or her commitment to advocating for student access to a quality educational experience.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Inquiry is the primary vehicle upon which *Piikani* education is based (Pepion, 1999). As reflected in the formative process of this research, future *Piikani* researchers could benefit greatly from gathering information by seeking knowledge through culturally-specific encounters (Bastien, 2004). The researcher and co-researcher's personal motivations for undertaking this project are tied directly to creating a framework for the transfer of knowledge from one person to another, a method that has been utilized by the *Piikani* for countless generations to share experiences and mentor others to fulfill needed contributions to the community (Bastien, 2004; Hernandez, 1999). In the case of this project, the researcher and co-researcher's transfer of knowledge creates a value-based framework for aspiring and seasoned school leaders practicing on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. As a *Piikani* person, satisfying the requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership, the process chosen will provide leverage for a research agenda that can purposefully validate the importance of *Piikani* cultural values (Smith, 2012). In addition, this contribution to scholarship can provide insight into the mitigation of challenges undertaken by those in school leadership roles, as they receive knowledge transferred to them that will lead them throughout their careers, which, by nature, is formative and continuously evolving (Gladstone & Pepion, 2016). Cultural identity and community relationality provide the succinct acknowledgment of community realities that are the direct result of long-standing, consistent colonization efforts (Hungry Wolf,

1980). Therefore, this project, by forming cognizant research methods (Maxwell, 2013), will explicitly examine the potential role of cultural values in improving school leadership practices.

This project's focus on the researcher and co-researcher's relationality is important (Wilson, 2008), especially in supporting the perpetuation of culturally revitalizing research through the use of the Community-Centered Digital Storywork (CCDS) approach for data collection (Rodgers-Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017). The CCDS approach is a surrogate under the Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) framework which is intended to engage learners, other researchers, and community members in collectively identifying relevant research priorities and responses in Indigenous communities (Hallett et al, 2017). The researchers' development of a formative research process mimics the *Piikani* transfer of knowledge, where culturally-specific encounters are seen as opportunities to seek critical knowledge (Bastien, 2014) and draw experiences (and power) from places to inform the process (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015), framing relevant research methods (Rodgers-Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017) that capture actionable and responsive school leadership practices.

## Methodological Approach

### Overview

The overall design of this project is intended to change or require adjustments throughout the entire process, guided principally by the discretion of the co-researcher.

This unconventional flexibility is needed to maintain the credibility of the Community

Centered Digital Storywork (CCDS) framework. This project does not draw from but

marginalizes dominant research paradigms, replacing them with *Piikani*-specific

approaches that responsively collect and analyze stories of the co-researcher for

meaningful experiences (Bastien, 2004) that connect the adherence to *Piikani* values and

the inadvertent impact on her school leadership practices. Inquiries about culture have

dominated research with narratives devised to allow for euro-centric understanding of

such phenomena through the compartmentalization of results into digestible components.

Western frameworks have for too long claimed supremacy over the "universal truth,"

which has slowed the acceptance of Indigenous research frameworks from being widely-

accepted in scholarly circles; therefore, typical research has generally been employed in

Indigenous communities relying on methods that the community had little or no influence

in customizing to satisfactorily encapsulate tribal knowledge and relevant findings

(Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) for the *Piikani* community, especially in education research.

    The paradigm shift needed to exclude research methods that have not proven to

provide enough in-depth understanding (Seidman, 2006) will allow for the Indigenous

communities to define relationships among the research components and variables of

similar projects. Relationships among those engaged in this project allowed for more

seamless collaboration with the co-researcher (Wilson, 2008), in order to uncover the

process that allowed for them to "transfer" knowledge to the researcher without it being

taken out of context through interpretation (Bastien, 2014). Stories told by the co-

researcher, through her lived experiences, offer intimate details of personal and

professional struggles related to school leadership experiences and should be accepted as legitimate data to serve the interests of the *Piikani* community (Frances IV & Munson, 2017) as a transfer of knowledge (Bastien, 2014) from seasoned school leader to aspiring (and/or current) school leaders. The results from this transfer of knowledge have been accompanied by cultural protocols to safeguard the co-researcher's ability to share (Bastien, 2014), without reinforcing assumptions by defining and analyzing the data within community contexts that reflect community reality (Chilisa, 2012). Experiences such as these are not likely to be isolated from the use of quantitative data collection. Rather, the qualitative approach derived from a series of interviews has provided the opportunity for meaningful connections by school leaders to optimize his or her own knowledge-base and form a tangible frame of reference regarding the recognition of the *Piikani* value system of learning.

The purpose of this project is to learn from a lifetime of experiences (Seidman, 2006) through the eyes of a long-standing school leader. Education requires, in this context, a qualitative approach (Seidman, 2006) to record and mirror *Piikani* community transfer of knowledge expectations of research (Bastien, 2004). Consequently, this project seeks to provide a glimpse into understanding the challenges, perspectives, and experiences (Seidman, 2006) of the co-researcher. Ordinarily, a sole co-researcher is seen as a major limitation of the quantitative approach to "measuring" outcomes to predict the effectiveness of such phenomena (Walter & Anderson, 2013), assuming it only provides a generalizable view of situations being studied (Chilisa, 2012).

This project will require the integration of data sources to accompany the audiovisual and transcription data, which includes the researcher/co-researcher field notes and documents that relate to the co-researcher's experiences (Yin, 2003a) tied to this formative process of transfer (Bastien, 2004). All of the above sources of data satisfy qualitative data requirements and are aligned with standard data collection, analysis, and dissemination methods (Seidman, 2006). The data and analysis will be shared and loosely based upon the single exploratory case study approach, which implies that the outcome of this project will trigger a shift in thinking into action (Yin, 2003b) concerning school leadership practices as a purveyor of *Piikani* values within schools they lead. The single exploratory case study approach for this project is formatted with a combination of direct quotes (and statements) from the co-researcher followed by the detailed analysis statements of the researcher (Yin (a), 2003). This more fluid qualitative approach allowed for the capturing of stories through appropriate *Piikani* situational research (Bastien, 2004), applied the community-based CCDS framework (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017), and reflects the Collective Storying Method (CSM) (Bishop, 1997) to provide the space for more intimate experiences to be told as a result of the relationship formed by researcher and co-researcher (Hallett et al, 2017; Wilson, 2008). Research and inquiry have been long-standing traits of transferring knowledge, which have sustained the *Piikani* and allowed for the preservation of values, culture, and language (Bastien, 2004) to serve as a foundation for tribes to transcend the self-determination era, into achieving sovereignty (Ladner, 2000).

Experiences that were passed down by the co-researcher invoke the need for more attention paid to cultural protocols (including transfer) (Bastien, 2004) and the importance of relationality demonstrated by her and the researcher, as they engage in reciprocal research (Wilson, 2008). The researcher possesses a high-level of personal knowledge and skill, pertaining to previous work in the community that produced research scholarship guided by the use of IRM's (Smith, 2012); therefore, the researcher, in order to capture the authentic essence of a person's lived experiences (Yin, 2003 (1)), must do so in ways that allow for a formative process which strengthens and validates the use of the cultural information (Chilisa, 2015; Smith, 2012) transferred to him by the co-researcher, thus maintaining the integrity of *Piikani* ways of knowing (Bastien, 2004).

Community-Centered Digital Storywork (CCDS)

This project investigates a longitudinal timeframe and process as it asks the co-researcher to reflect on past experiences (Yin (a), 2003). By using the CCDS framework, it holistically centralizes the process (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017) in which school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation can, through learning, experience, and sharing, develop strategies that are defined by the use of cultural values impacting practices. The methods used in this project mirror the previous use of the CCDS framework formalized by Blackfeet Community College's *Piikani* Digital Histories Project (PDHP), using the framework of the Six R's of Respect, Relevance, Responsibility, Reciprocity, Relationality (Archibald, 2008; Barnhardt, 2001; Kirkness & Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008), and Representation (Stanton & Ricciardelli, 2017; Burd, Cox &Hall, 2017) as guiding principles for engaging community members in research.

This project, through implicit co-researcher engagement, demarcates the use of methods shown to be aligned with *Piikani* expectations for the collection, analysis, and sharing of knowledge, or in this case, data.

Both this dissertation and the PDHP used CCDS as its foundation, extracting from other Indigenous and *Piikani* specific sources to expand upon a framework of originally Five R's (Archibald, 2008; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Due to the PDHP, a sixth "R" for *Representation* was included, as information shared has to be reflective of community reality, not left up to outside interpretation. The PDHP changed the paradigm regarding what researchers in CCDS refer to as subjects or participants. Conversely, they are seen as the main force in driving research inquiry and determining what is ultimately shared. Hence, they are to be considered co-researchers (Stanton & Ricciardelli, 2017).

*Table 2*. The Six (6) R's Framework components (Burd, Cox & Hall, 2017)

| Components | Application | Community Dynamics | Researchers' Roles | Objective |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respect (1) | Fundamental in validating community-based knowledge | Orientates the "authority of voice" to focus on community-based knowledge | Researcher is a "learner" not an expert | Critical in the generational transmission of community-based knowledge |
| Relevance (2) | Applies to ALL areas of inquiry | Interdisciplinary approach to combining community-based knowledge and individual ideas together, even if they are different interpretations | Researcher limitations do not define their overall participation, rather their skills whether technical or practical when applied to a project provide those with limited cultural and/or technical knowledge a vehicle to contribute | Community-based knowledge allows for continuity of efforts, enhances access to information, and informs an action/advocacy platform |
| Responsibility (3) | Broad application from the researchers to the co-researchers | Community-based knowledge as a message for stakeholders and "allies" | Accountability is concurrent throughout the process | Not to reinforce stereotypes or misconceptions |

*Table 2*. The Six (6) R's Framework components (Burd, Cox & Hall, 2017), continued

| Reciprocity (4) | Collective community-based knowledge that is responsive to community need and reality | Acknowledging contributions, honoring differences | Partnerships and collaborations provide all involved with the space to learn and apply what they know to move the project forward | Action resulting from the information provided needs to benefit the community, not research agendas |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Relationality (5) | Researcher and co-researchers are interrelated regardless of their informal or formal relationships | Community acceptance or familiarity with researchers heightens the opportunity for community-based knowledge to be conveyed | Co-researchers are provided adequate space to inform the process as well as define the role of the researcher | |
| Representation (6) | Combating stereotypes through the reclamation/revitalization of community-based knowledge | Native communities are not conveniently homogeneous, rather they are diverse and unique | Individual identity of the researcher demands that they remain grounded in the framework in order to ensure credibility and stimulate community interest | Application of knowledge in a contemporary sense requires a keen understanding in operationalizing cultural components to meet current challenges |

*Piikani* Situational Research

The tendency to label and identify cultural traits imposes generalizations that contradict the importance of cultural frameworks (Bastien, 2014; Chilisa, 2012) in understanding ways of supporting the education of Indigenous students. Community culture provides a general framework for understanding Indigenous (or *Piikani*) students both historically and intellectually (Bastien, 2014; Smith, 2012), while distinct differences exist at the community and family level that, too, highlight the complexities school leaders, teachers, and staff members need to recognize (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010). This project also seeks to emphasize the importance of recognizing place-based work and application of enhancing access to cultural knowledge that align with the aims of Indigenous research (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). In accordance with the sequence of documented results of this dissertation, information was organized in alignment to cultural values (Bataille & Mullen-Sands, 1984), in this case "The Hoop of Values" framework of the Blackfeet Education Standards (2005), and was organized using the English terms that are related to *Piikani* notions concerning Honesty, Generosity, Respect, Spirituality, Courage, Humility, and Compassion, the "Markers of the Path of Life."

The creation of the Blackfeet Educational Standards (2005) and the "Hoop of Values" framework was not merely theoretical in nature: it mimics the lived cultural experiences of the *Piikani* and is grounded in innate connections that sustain community life. The creation of such resources and standards is reminiscent of "Tenant 9" of Tribal Critical Race Theory (TCRT) as it pertains to tribes assuming more responsibility over

influencing pedagogical content and establishing practical frameworks that are aligned to

the community's definition of a quality education (Brayboy, 2006). The capturing of the

co-researcher's knowledge and experiences using CCDS as a mechanism for transferring

knowledge on to others, cannot be adequately structured in standard organizational (or

methodological) framework (Stanton & Ricciardelli, 2017; Burd, Cox &Hall, 2017).

Therefore, the methodological structure is less of a well-designed framework as it is a

series of culturally-specific encounters that optimize the validity of this project, in terms

of its relevance to community knowledge being transferred (Bastien, 2014). CCDS does

not actively seek to provide information that can be organized and separated without

recognizing the interrelated nature of the *Piikani* values and culture (Stanton, Ricciardelli

& Hall, 2017); rather, it exposes links between the co-researcher's experience and the

*Piikani* values as interdependent factors simultaneously occurring in the same time and

place, as *Piikani* values are not independent from one another but interconnected and

related (Bastien, 2014; Little Bear, 2000; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992).

Understanding how behaviors associated with an individual's adherence to *Piikani* values

can develop culturally-grounded character traits (Running Wolf, 1999) results in a

phenomenon that is captured by divulging individual experiences, inherent attitudes

about his or her professional limitations, and personal perceptions (Yin (a), 2003) of how

these practices affected a school leader's ability to responsively lead schools on the

Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

Procedural factors in this project mirror the use and application of *Piikani*

research methods, including but not limited to tribally-specific models or methods such

as protocol (Bastien, 2004), inquiry tactics, and the researcher's appropriate

dissemination of cultural (and personal) information resulting from this project (Kovach,

2009; Wilson, 2008). Evoking the experiences of one person through storytelling was

enhanced (Archibald, 2008) by conducting interviews (Maxwell, 2013) with the co-

researcher in places where they worked or had formative experiences (Tuck &

McKenzie, 2015) that they intended to transfer on to others (Bastien, 2014), so school

leaders (aspiring and current) can relate them to their own experiences and/or apply

lessons learned into future practice. Memories and place play an integral role in

extracting information about how they are able to relate practice (in this case as a school

leader) to his or her own cultural value system (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) and

demonstrate for the researcher how the values helped the co-researcher evolve their

practices over the course of their career as a school leader.

     This project uses the Blackfeet Educational Standards (2005) framework in an

attempt to promote its operationalization and purpose as it pertains to the role of school

leaders in the dissemination of *Piikani* values to community stakeholders through the

practice and application of school leadership. With the limited amount of information on

this topic, it is critical that the level of inquiry remain general and less specific as to form

a foundation for *Piikani* school leadership practice to then expand into other specific

areas through further inquiry and analysis (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017). This

project's exploratory process identified causal links to the co-researcher's transfer of

knowledge to then enable her to assist the researcher in the analysis of the data; therefore,

this formative process provided tangible evidence that the *Piikani* culture is alive and

adapting to changing circumstances and contexts, with the contemporary use of storytelling on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. The product of this project will provide an intricately textured and documented approach to exploring socially adaptive behaviors that are re-operationalized to reclaim socio-cultural and community-based evidence (Yin (a), 2003) that integrates *Piikani* values into school leadership perspectives and practices.

This project was influenced by the cultural context in which it is designed (Smith, 2012). Although the project topic was chosen by the researcher, the methodology seeks to allow marginal liberties to the co-researcher (Wilson, 2008), which guided the overall collection of data (Maxwell, 2013) and was cognizant of the importance of community input, as well as protocol, in generating (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013) and transferring such knowledge (Bastien, 2014). The researcher formally selected his four-person dissertation committee in July 2014, to provide relevant expertise in school leadership, bilingual/multicultural education, and practical knowledge of Indigenous Research Methodologies (IRM). This research requires permission from the Blackfeet Nation Institutional Review Board (BNIRB), which was approved on February 15, 2017. Interviews with the co-researcher for this project were primarily conducted in the winter months and spanned from February 17 to June 30, 2017. The project's researcher successfully defended his dissertation to his committee and others (May 3, 2018), at the Montana State University-Bozeman campus; the researcher, along with the co-researcher, presented the findings of this project to members of the *Piikani* community at Blackfeet Community College in Browning, Montana (June 29, 2018). The nature of this project and its associated processes undertaken intentionally only gained BNIRB approval to

affirm tribal sovereignty through the use of *Piikani* Research Methodologies (PRM), as well as demonstrate the merit and expectations needed to satisfy both community and university dissertation requirements. This formative process of transfer concluded and strengthened the integrity of the *Piikani* culture by reinforcing the importance of making findings relevant and accessible to the community (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

<u>Role of the Researcher</u>

This project seeks to remove dominant research methods that promote co-researchers and the community as "others", by positioning the role of researcher as a contributor to collaborative community knowledge sharing and creation. Academic institutions, through this paradigm, are not the sole producers of knowledge. Rather, they should legitimize the community's (and in this case, the project's research participant's) role to determine how much or how little information can be divulged to maintain *Piikani* cultural integrity. Community control over information procured from research activities is critical in this project, as it provides for a shift in the development of frameworks that advance post-colonial theories originating from relevant epistemologies (Chilisa, 2012). The framework used by the researcher cannot be exclusively Western in orientation. Non-Indigenous frameworks do little to emulate the complexities of stories and experiences of research participants in tribal communities; therefore, it is important for this study not to promote an essentialist approach to collecting and sharing information from community members.

To conform to non-Indigenous methods minimizes existing cultural frameworks already established within the community. The scope of this research exemplifies that

there is great promise in furthering cultural frameworks (Grande, 2004), which requires

this process to allow for the flexibility to construct and adapt a framework (Maxwell,

2013) that validates the importance of values and beliefs in addressing pervasive

problems (Chilisa, 2012) in education on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. To continue

to exclude Indigenous frameworks, namely those that exist among the *Piikani*,

disenfranchises these frameworks to be seen as "abnormal approaches." Therefore, as an

exercise in sovereignty, it is critical that, through academic discourse, we advance the use

and the replication of research methods that are relevant to the culture being examined.

The term sovereignty, for example, is a complex series of relationships that are tied to the

Indigenous experience; therefore, these "abnormal approaches" are a product and a

symptom of Indigenous survival and perseverance through resistance. The researcher

needs to convey a keen understanding of how this research and its methods will be used

to support interventions or changes; this is one major contextual difference in using

Indigenous methods rather than drawing from methods that are more widely accepted in

academia (Frances IV & Munson, 2017).

　　　　*Piikani* epistemologies will drive the theoretical foundations of this project, where

the researcher and the participant exhibit high levels of relationality through interactions

in a balanced space where known contextual differences are not segregated but combined

and told through story. Although Indigenous knowledge and inquiry is often at odds with

Western methods (Kovach, 2009), it is important to note that assumptions about identity

and experience can be marginalizing (Grande, 2004; Chilisa, 2012) to the participant if

the researcher exclusively employs one methodological paradigm over the other.

Indigenous frameworks, such as in the case of this project, are strengthened by Western

methods; however, those methods cannot drive the nature in which information from the

participant is obtained. This project, and the researcher through this process, expand upon

the responsive urgency that Indigenous scholars face when providing background on the

nature of how research represents his community. Therefore, it is important that such

inquiry provides information to research participants from the cultural congruence of

methods used, to community epistemological differences, and the contextual themes

arising from this project (Kovach, 2004).

 Driving research using relevant theoretical frameworks is a reflection of the

*Piikani* people's desire to collect information regarding needed changes to community

systems, many of which have been entrenched by imposed colonial organizational

practices and norms. Theoretical frameworks, such as those prescribed for researchers or,

for Indigenous communities, cannot be used to disenfranchise existing cultural

frameworks as they are a product and true depiction of community reality (Chilisa, 2012).

In this context, *Piikani* epistemologies and frameworks deserve the same, if not more,

legitimacy than Western-based frameworks used by researchers working in Indigenous

communities (Bastien, 2004), as they are now being compelled to use exclusively what

methods the community forms and supports. Research should also not perpetuate further

degradation of already fragile cultures (and languages) through the use of deficit

modeling or the exclusion of community vernacular and expression in sharing

community-based inquiry (Chilisa, 2012).

For Indigenous researchers working within the *Piikani* context, it is paramount that school leader's efforts enhance community culture and epistemologies as they pursue topics relevant to the community. This project has to transfer school leadership experience through the use of storytelling into actionable solutions that are intended to guide current and future school leaders to mitigate challenges. Experiences will be derived through the engagement of a single former school leader and *Piikani* community member as the sole participant in this research. This project cannot meet the needs of the academy solely. Rather it should place relevant experiences of participants as a guiding principle for current and potential areas of community-based research. Community development, by way of the researcher's positionality, will prioritize the scope of how this project will be conducted as the *Piikani* framework being formed, needs to be operational and seek to mitigate potential issues as seen through the lens of the respective community and culture. The frameworks needed to conduct Indigenous research are not theoretical, but drawn from a living system with a collective of experiences. To perpetuate the idea that cultural beliefs and values are theoretical deemphasizes the prescriptions made in opposition to the continual use of Western research paradigms that have proven to be ineffective in addressing Indigenous community needs (Smith, 2012). This project will not only further the importance of community-based knowledge but enhance the use of frameworks developed by Indigenous communities for researchers to responsibly work among Indigenous people.

The tendency toward accepting quantitative measures over qualitative approaches has long dominated research among Indigenous populations. Data primarily derived from

Indigenous communities is provided for the sole purposes of driving community-based

inquiry (or in the scope of this project, Pre K -14 school systems) whose policies

relevantly reflect community expectations, rather than assert settler nation dominion over

people and systems in these communities. Many times Indigenous communities are not

provided the influence to determine appropriate measures of success. This is problematic

due to the lack of depth provided by prominent research paradigms, which is not relevant

enough for these communities to analyze and use data in tangible ways. Indigenous

education statistics for example, are consistently in comparison to euro-centric views of

success, consistently denoting "gaps" that allow deficit-based approaches to dominate

conversations around economic (and educational) policies in relation to community

reality. School leadership best practices and goals that are driven by only quantitative

data are not in alignment with Indigenous community well-being and sovereignty (Walter

& Anderson, 2013). Contemporary misunderstandings of leadership practice have

diminished and inundated research as well as educational leadership curriculum,

misguiding practitioners on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation by not incorporating a

specific focus on *Piikani* Indigenous leadership (Gladstone & Pepion, 2016) and values,

as this project suggests.

A critical approach to the application of a community-based qualitative

framework will reinforce how the research process allows access to obtain community

knowledge and is not the sole objective, but rather by collecting data in a culturally-based

manner promotes and supports needed changes (Wilson, 2008), as well as heightens

community awareness on issues (Chilisa, 2012). Adapting these changes to fulfill

community priorities compels this project to recognize relationships and connections as

Indigenous inquiry has stressed (Wilson, 2008) through the reclamation of knowledge as

a source of strength for Indigenous scholars to argue the practicality of community-based

frameworks (Smith, 2012). This project is vested in the "survivance" of the community,

or in the continued dynamic existence of stories and other cultural practices that can

assist in the resistance or persistence of *Piikani* ways of knowing (Vizenor, 2008). The

presence of culture and the continuation of community knowledge (Chilisa, 2012) is a

formative process that requires the researchers to advance community-based frameworks

that define community relationality and deconstruct other frameworks that provide little

space for Indigenous values or culture to structure the nature of research (Wilson, 2008).

Researcher Positionality

The research design of this project is highly dependent on the researcher's

connection to his community and pre-established personal relationship with the co-

researcher. Being *Piikani* provides the researcher with the leverage to explore the

Blackfeet Indian Reservation community through interactions that epitomize critical

contexts originating from the transfer of knowledge from the culture (Bastien, 2004).

This type of exclusive relationship may be challenging for some researchers who do not

share the same cultural identity (Smith, 2005) or have a similar level of relationality to

his or her co-researcher as this project called upon the researchers to continuously pull

from relational connections that foster their ability to conduct such inquiry collectively

(Wilson, 2008). The researcher treats the co-researcher in an equitable manner (Seidman,

2006); this is reinforced by the absence of Western research methods, that assert

researcher control over the process and the concepts derived from their research. By promoting personal relationality with the co-researcher as the primary tool for reinforcing chosen methods (Wilson, 2008), this project did not endorse the use of other methods considered incompatible or non-responsive to the needs of Indigenous communities (Smith, 2012).

*Oki, niistoo niitaaniiko Omaksaakoomapi… Ampskaapi Piikani*

> I was raised on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in north central Montana. First and foremost, I am a teacher, teaching exclusively on my home reservation and eventually becoming an administrator, or in the terminology of my own research, a school leader. My family values education; my parents were the first in my family to attend and finish college. They raised my siblings and I on the land on which I now stand. I feel that my own life experiences continue to ground my own inquiry and positionality reflecting my worldview as an *Ampskaapi Piikani*. I was always intrigued by history, which embodied for me how the past is ever present and tied to my own future; this insight is linked to the resiliency of my nation. Every federal government policy imposed on Indigenous people, throughout the last 150 years has molded the experience of those who came before me, my ancestors. I have been impacted in many ways, as I grew into an adult, by the values and customs instilled in me by my family and culture. These experiences have provided me with a strong foundation to accept the challenge of educational research and leadership. My Great-Uncle Jim Spotted Eagle gave me the name *Omaksaakoomapi*, which in English means "Big Boy," a name that was

held previously by my late grandfather Alvin Patrick "Fat" Hall. In the *Piikani* culture, "naming" identifies an individual in the context of a collective commitment to always be in a position to contribute to family, community, and our nation. Names given are not purely physical, rather a metaphorical principal which will continue to guide my life as I may be bestowed with other names and cultural transfers throughout my lifetime.

My own knowledge of who I am, did not come from a book or peer-edited article, but from stories and experiences of my greatest influences through our most important transfer of knowledge process, storytelling. This transfer of knowledge has and will continue to sustain me for my entire lifetime and career. The institutions I have served were sustained by my own resiliency which has guided and refined my leadership practices, as a historian, teacher, school leader, and *Piikani* researcher. As a researcher, I am distinctly tied to focusing on relationality as a learner; therefore, the transfer of knowledge in the *Piikani* culture requires the learner to be purposefully attentive to the teacher's words, mannerisms, and lessons. This formative process seeks to link the learners' knowledge and skills, to fulfilling their obligations to community.

Inquiry and knowledge have always existed in *Piikani* culture. Through a series of stories and experiences, I am able to contextualize my own methods of research into addressing school leadership challenges that I encounter on a daily basis. I see beyond what early, "well intentioned" educators saw, who whole-heartedly believed that my culture and family was an impediment, rather than an inner-

strength that lead me to accomplish my own personal successes. and I am positioned to be critical of the interpretations of others, to be appreciative of my allies, and will forever be linked to the land I stand on as it has shaped my identity and discourse, which has solidified my unwavering commitment to my community.

## Purposeful Selection

The co-researcher in this project was selected due to her longevity on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation as a school leader, as well as for her extensive knowledge of the *Piikani* culture and language. As this project is seeking unprecedented access into the life and career of a school leader on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, her transfer of knowledge focuses on how her own experiences can be used to uncover behavioral traits associated with the use of *Piikani* values as guiding factors in developing her own school leadership practices. Other criteria required by this project include the co-researcher being trained in a mainstream teacher training program, having school leadership experience, and a degree in school leadership. Furthermore, the co-researcher is a fluent speaker of the *Piikani* language and was raised in the context of the culture (Pepion, 1999; Bastien, 2004).The rationale for identifying the participant in the project as a co-researcher, is tied to the amount of time and energy she had to devote to this project, recalling relevant information, studying the language, and her role in the analysis of the data; therefore, her role is more than just telling stories, but through the transferring of relatable experiences is furthering inquiry and expanding knowledge through her full participation throughout the research process.

Co-Researcher Information

  The co-researcher chosen for this project, is to be referred to as "*Noonaki*," a

Blackfoot (*Kanai*) from near Cardston, Alberta, who over the last forty years has resided

and worked in Browning, Montana on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. *Noonaki* was a

long standing school leader (recently retired) on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, is a

fluent speaker of the *Piikani* language, and throughout her life has been active in

advocating for *Piikani* culture and language integration into public education. A personal

relationship between *Noonaki* and the researcher, were critical especially in an

autobiographical approach that garners intimate information from reflections and life

experiences, characteristic of profiles of documenting contemporary Indigenous women

in North America (Bataille & Mullen-Sands, 1984). *Noonaki* had exclusive leverage in

defining the timeline, scope (and length) of interviews, where the interviews took place,

and whether or not the footage will ultimately be used post-dissertation for the purpose of

educating school leaders of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. It is recognized that critical

views of personal recollections of lived experiences and history can potentially be

challenged by the community or its members, where alternative experiences may be ever

present in the Indigenous context. Although this approach provides the researcher with

less control, it solidifies the contribution of *Noonaki* as the driving force as prescribed by

the CCDS framework (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017) and promotes the authenticity

of the single exploratory case study format being used (Yin, 2003b) for this project.

  The exchange of information through this project requires various interactions

between the co-researcher and researcher to gain insight to conduct inquiry in the context

of a particular Indigenous community's expectations (Wilson, 2008) and is fostered

through a long-term, pre-existing relationship between both parties (Maxwell, 2013).

This project seeks to accommodate the co-researcher's historical and cultural

perspectives regarding her career and development as a school leader, as a process that is

refined over-time and through a series of specific experiences. *Noonaki* expands upon

specific information about her background, education, and experiences in the next

chapter (chapter 4), *Piikaniomahtanistaissihpi* or "How We Come to Know How the

Universe Works."

<div align="center">Research Procedures</div>

Data Sources and Information

Interview footage collected as the basis for this single exploratory case study

(Yin, 2003a; Yin, 2003) is based on one co-researcher's school leadership experiences

and reflections on her integration of *Piikani* values into practice.  The tendency has been

to exclude storytelling as a formidable research tool (Seidman, 2006); therefore, these

methods have not been provided with the scholarly credibility required by Western

academic discourse. However, in the context of *Piikani* culture, storytelling is the

embodiment of lived reality (Bastien, 2004), as information is directly and most often

relayed through story (Archibald, 2008). The qualitative approach to research, primarily

through interviews, signals a critical shift in research (Seidman, 2006) to complement

cultural methods of inquiry relative to each individual tribe (Kovach, 2009). This

approach identifies and provides for ideal cultural considerations for the extraction of

experiences (Seidman, 2006) that allow for the operational integration of *Piikani* values

(Running Wolf, 1999; Pepion, 1999; Bastien, 2004).

The qualitative research approach, although the most like storytelling Indigenous

processes, is often disrupted by Western regimented research structures that have

routinely questioned its validity, as it places emphasis on lived experiences and less on

the control of the researcher. The qualitative methods used in this project, need to place

the co-researcher and her stories at the forefront of the analysis ensuring authentic

dialogue. The common ground in research for Indigenous communities is that these

methods continue to be advanced by academic and community relations. What is

produced from process to product, speaks to the communities and provides her culture

with the exclusive leverage to determine how research is conducted (Frances IV &

Munson, 2017). This project is, by nature, a research study that is specific to a cultural

ethnography approach to qualitative research (Yin (a), 2003); therefore, it is important

that this project be culturally driven. It takes into special consideration the use of relevant

methods to capture cultural concepts that differ from mainstream assumptions (Smith,

2012) and promote the inclusion of more relevant methods of inquiry (Carjuzaa & Ruff,

2010).

Real-life situations and phenomena captured by research, as in the case of this

project, require that audiovisual interviews capture entire segments of conversations;

thence through culturally-specific modifications to data transferred from *Noonaki*

(Bastien, 2014), she is granted the ability to assist the researcher in organizing and

actively coding her statements as they fit into her general understanding of each of the

particular seven *Piikani* values (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017). Traditional methods

of interview, as an incremental process, are limiting to the integrity of this project.

Therefore, it was necessary to integrate *Piikani* cultural protocol (Bastien, 2004) and

other "alternative" considerations that are relevant to the process (Seidman, 2006). This

has allowed the co-researcher to determine many of the details of the interview, including

the places and contexts in which the research takes place (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall,

2017). The nature of this project requires a high-level of restraint to avoid guiding the

process where the information provided by the co-researcher can be taken out of context.

Accordingly, the intent is to gather data within the confines of how interactions occur

(Seidman, 2006), which is guided by the pre-existing relationality between the co-

researcher and the researcher (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017).

*Noonaki* was asked how she interprets the Blackfeet Educational Standards (2005)

framework as well as to define for herself what each of the seven (7) *Piikani* values

mean; furthermore, she was asked questions that allowed her to relate to how each

*Piikani* value corresponded to her own school leadership experiences and practices, all

within the context of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Digital documentation of

interviews was recorded and used to capture what was said by *Noonaki* and to uncover

her expressions conveying the complexity of the research questions she was being asked

(Cowie, 2011). Data collected from *Noonaki's* stories relaying her experiences was the

catalyst for dialogue between her and the researcher, which required the line of

questioning to be open ended (Hallett et al, 2017). The researcher maintained field notes

that captured conversations outside of the digitally recorded interviews, and were also

recorded by the researcher when he and *Noonaki* collectively conversed while analyzing

the text from the transcriptions during the process of coding her stories. Additionally,

*Noonaki* kept her own field notes as she combed through her transcribed words to correct

grammatical errors or clarify statements made in the interviews that were not clear or not

recognized by the transcription software. Due to *Noonaki's* expertise in the *Piikani*

language, she was also called upon to interpret and coin terms in a non-English format so

that the researcher could ensure that the language included articulating the *Piikani* values,

as they pertain to her school leadership experiences or practices.

   *Noonaki's* questioning was limited due to the conditions of this project, as the

intention is to not prompt or lead her contributions to the data, rather set the expectation

that she align her responses to the Blackfeet Educational Standards Framework (2005)

and the associated "Hoop of Values." Responses to the questions asked to *Noonaki* are

the source of evidence (Archibald, 2009); therefore, it is important for her to understand

the broad definition of each *Piikani* value, as they pertain to questions used to extract

experiential data (Yin (a), 2003) as well as connect them to her school leadership

experiences and practices. The number of interviews and the length was subject to

*Noonaki's* availability away from her family, other obligations, or how she felt on that

particular day; therefore, some interviews were shortened and/or postponed at *Noonaki's*

discretion. The location of the interviews was determined by *Noonaki*, based on where

she worked and where the researcher was able to gain access; therefore, the researcher

needed to facilitate both *Noonaki's* availability for interviews and accessibility to those

locations, all of which occurred during the hazardous winter months. Questions revolved

around the recollection of occurrences, actions, and recollections of her childhood and beyond; therefore, the method of interview was anchored and influenced by each individual setting (Maxwell, 2013) in relation to using these places as a source of knowledge (Gruenewald, 2008; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) for this project.

Digital footage from the interviews was transcribed to provide *Noonaki* and the researcher with written data that could be used for thematic analysis (Seidman, 2006) of responses to questions related to the practice of *Piikani* values (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017) within her school leadership experiences. Transcriptions from the digital stories were also used to capture instances when the *Piikani* language was used to describe English-terms or concepts. This was critical to assisting in organization of both English and *Piikani* text for data analysis (Ritchie, 2003). This project seeks to capture the *Piikani* language, as it is told or spoken when it is integrated into a post-dissertation digital story (Stanton & Ricciardelli, 2017). This digital story will include both spoken and transcribed language (into English and, in some cases, into *Piikani*), that has been provided by the co-researcher (Cowie, 2011). Data collection was done using two filmmakers who both had past involvement with the PDHP and had participated in the CCDS process on previous research projects (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017).

Documentation and other data provided by *Noonaki*, through the granted permission, was also found in archival and/or personal records, which included but was not limited to personal photographs, documents, and related records in an attempt to integrate more data to link to her stories; However, as inclusive in the CCDS format (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017), *Noonaki* opted to only share her personal records as

it pertained to the development of chapters 4-11, and will not be included in the published version of this dissertation or in further analysis (and dissemination) of audiovisual interview footage. All sources collected were digitized (including the interview footage in full and un-edited form) and kept in a secure file hard drive (Ritchie, 2003), and, by the request of the co-researcher, not shared or included in this dissertation, other than in anecdotal mentioning in the analysis of the data. The audiovisual and other data source files were only accessed by the researcher and *Noonak*i; whereas, the filmmaker(s) only had access to the audiovisual interview footage and the transcriptionist only received the audio files to apply to transcription software for analysis. All footage, documents, and/or artifacts collected for the final product of this project will be granted final approval for use by the co-researcher (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017). A consent form for *Noonaki* is required. Additionally, confidentiality forms were required for associates to this project including a filmmaker(s), transcriber, and the editor to maintain strict confidentially through their involvement in the project.

This project's data collection timeline included eight (8) separate interviews, held at eight (8) separate locations, and each instance had an average interview time of about four (4) hours. The following locations were chosen by the co-researcher, based on her personal preference and where her school leadership experiences occurred:

- Head-Smashed-In, World Heritage Site, Visitor Center, Ft. McLeod, Alberta, Canada

- Blackfeet Community College, Student Success Center, Browning, Montana

- Browning Middle School, Main Office, Browning, Montana

- Babb Elementary School, Cafeteria, Babb, Montana

- Browning Public School District #9, Administration Building, Browning, Montana

- Big Sky Elementary School (under Browning Public School District #9), Big Sky Hutterite Colony, Cut Bank, Montana

- Glendale Elementary School (under Browning Public School District #9), Glendale Colony, Cut Bank, Montana

- Montana State University-Bozeman, Center for Bilingual and Multicultural Education, Bozeman, Montana

Analysis and Dissemination

The analysis of the transcription data for this project originated from digital stories of audio visually recorded interviews (Seidman, 2006), where *Noonaki* interacted with locations she selected from her experiences (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) as a school leader; thus, she recalled experiences that spanned her entire lifetime from childhood, to the beginning of her educational leadership journey, to the last position she held as a school leader. (Gruenewald, 2008). Through this formative process arises a replicable method for conducting qualitative research (Yin (a), 2003) on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. This approach to research also offers greater potential of the community accessing information originating from this project and increases the opportunity to provide professional development for school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, as well as abroad, to inform Indigenous research methodologies and convey (or transfer)

knowledge for community-centered research (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017) in

education and other fields. The resulting footage and the findings from this project, upon

*Noonaki's* approval, will be shared with other educational leaders and community

members within in the *Piikani* community, as required by the BNIRB. The audiovisual

format is more accessible and dynamic than conventional, academic modes of sharing, so

it will allow for more practical, culturally appropriate, and efficient dissemination

(Stanton & Ricciardelli, 2017) of *Piikani* school leadership knowledge transferred by

*Noonaki*.

Transcriptions were drafted by a transcriptionist through the access to audio files

from interview footage (Ritchie, 2003) and were then analyzed by *Noonaki* and the

researcher; furthermore, text was written into each section of the case study after

corresponding narratives (Yin (a), 2003), through a form of collaborative story boarding,

to organize the ideas and flow of the narratives and data in chapters 4-12 (Stanton,

Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017). This was done to ensure that *Noonaki* maintained control over

the formative process of her transfer of knowledge to the researcher, who sought to

holistically and collaboratively review the interview transcripts with her to identify

correlations between her experiences, *Piikani* values, and school leadership practices.

These conversations also noted important topics in school leadership in which *Noonaki*

and the researcher were able to engage using shared experiences due to both working in

school leadership positions on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Using open and focused

coding, through story boarding, produced examples of situations, places, and/or other

stories that she had the liberty of fitting into the themes and sub-themes originating from

the review of the literature (Chapter 2) and the *Piikani* "Hoop of Values" framework that

was outlined in this project. Nonetheless, *Noonaki*, in some instances, repeated similar

data within the multiple interviews; therefore, she was given the opportunity to determine

for the researcher which instances best represented her experiences, while eliminating

data that did not. The open and focused coding was used as the data pertained to the

*Piikani* values, and through the use of story boarding, *Noonaki* and the researcher

selected text and statements from the audiovisual footage and interview transcriptions to

determine which value they corresponded to. Story boarding is a technique used in

filmmaking to assist in the organization of footage into the format of a film, which is one

of the intended outcomes of this project, to share her experiences with the community.

These methods proved instrumental in allowing for the researcher to begin verifying

knowledge transferred by *Noonaki* through her assistance with coding and the data

alignment to the *Piikani* values.

     The use of coding, however could not be used to dismantle or break apart stories,

as this is widely viewed as culturally inappropriate (to not keep stories intact the way

they were told) (Hallett et al, 2017). Changes and alterations to data was not merely at the

will of the researcher, but rather only with the consent of *Noonaki*. Patterns of *Noonaki's*

school leadership experiences manifested themselves to fall within a particular *Piikani*

value guided by the general acceptance of each *Piikani* value's categorical meaning.

Compartmentalization of data for this project will become less fluid as some experiences

and/or practices will meet the expectations of one or more of the *Piikani* values (Stanton,

Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017), as *Piikani* values are occurring concurrently within the same

segment of time and place and are not happening independent of one another (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015).

Interactions between *Noonaki* and the researcher required the reflection of complex events as her transfer of knowledge connected her school leadership experiences and practices to at least one or more of the *Piikani* values. Integrated with the format and expectations of the dissertation defense and *Piikani* protocols, the data and findings of this project were provided to the *Piikani* community by *Noonaki* and the researcher; this presentation was accompanied by a Blackfoot prayer, traditional meal, and other presentations that reinforced the cultural integrity of her transfer of this knowledge to community professionals and members. This project is to serve as a model for encouraging the future integration of indigenized research, analysis, and dissemination processes into the defense of dissertations of *Piikani* and other Indigenous scholars, as re-thinking these processes will become persistently critical to exploring Indigenous phenomenon related to enhancing community responses through research.

Trustworthiness

Depending on *Noonaki's* past interactions with the researcher through community or kinship ties, it is important that the researcher provides her with the ability to tell her story (Archibald, 2008; Wilson, 2008). The high level of trust exhibited by the personal relationship that exists between both parties was pre-existing prior to the inception of this project. This not only helped *Noonaki* feel comfortable (Wilson, 2008) with transferring her information to the researcher (Korstjens & Moser, 2018); but *Noonaki's* influence over the project's objectives, methods, analysis, and dissemination of data, provided

greater validity to the formative process developed for this project (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). *Noonaki'*s exclusive involvement in determining the trajectory of the project, limited the tendency of the qualitative research approach to over-generalize experiences she shared (Maxwell, 2013); therefore, controls that exist within the scope of this project, are very limited and dependent upon *Noonaki's* discretion (Bastien, 2004) in ensuring the credibility and authenticity (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) of the school leadership experiences she shared. This is also strengthened by *Noonaki's* cultural fitness to possess knowledge specific to the thematic traits (*Piikani* values) and her long-standing career as a school leader on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, both of which qualify her to provide information (Bastien, 2004) that can be transferred and applied to similar contexts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

The unprecedented and "analogous" nature of this project directly tests CCDS as a replicable framework and expands upon *Piikani* knowledge as its integration pertains to the individual (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017) values that can be turned into responsive school leadership practices. Unlike other single exploratory case studies, the researcher relied heavily on the use of seminal examples of *Piikani* research methodology as well as the application of appropriate cultural protocols (Bastien, 2004). The two primary items that affect the validity of interview or similar qualitative approaches are "researcher bias" and reactivity (Yin (a), 2003). Subjectivity is said to provide a distinction between the researcher and the project (Maxwell, 2013); however, in the examination of this project, bias is connected to *Noonaki* and the researcher's motivation to engage in this project (Wilson, 2008).

The data and information provided is confirmed (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) by *Noonaki's* recognized status within the educational community of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation; furthermore, she is often sought as a source of knowledge, especially in her transfers of knowledge pertaining to the *Piikani* culture and language (Bastien, 2004; Gladstone& Pepion, 2016; Pepion, 1999) in the context of education. The researcher emphasizes his role in maintaining an acute observance of understanding his own personal biases (Maxwell, 2013); however, these biases (including those of *Noonaki*) are also ever-present and are critical to conducting research (Wilson, 2008) as they are tied to her experiences that expanded research (Archibald, 2008). This project was dependent on *Noonaki's* sole experience (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) to understand the dynamics of school leadership on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, whereas before, no scholarship existed to provide context specific to *Piikani* school leaders using the *Piikani* values to guide their practices.

<div align="center">Methodology Summary</div>

Generally the data collection, analysis, and dissemination for this project can be summarized in the following eight (8) steps; 1) Record interviews with audiovisual technology; 2) Review recordings and transcribe interviews; 3) Review supporting documents and archival material with *Noonaki*; 4) Organize audiovisual transcribed data through their alignment with *Piikani* values as guided by *Noonaki*; 5) Edit transcription data with *Noonaki* to include them in chapters 4-12 of this dissertation; 6)  Edit audiovisual footage to offer examples of *Piikani* values in a film format, using coded

transcriptions; 7) Share in defense of dissertation with the researcher's committee; and 8) Share dissertation and film with the *Piikani* community.

This project is an unprecedented opportunity to enlighten predominantly non-Indigenous institutions (and graduate level faculty) and potential school leaders on Indigenous ways of knowing as well as cultural protocols that impact research processes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduate students working and researching in tribal communities. This project seeks to form connections for school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation as to how they can utilize *Piikani* values as guiding principles in the formation of responsive and actionable practices that increase the likelihood of his or her effectiveness, amidst challenges they will be asked to mitigate. This emerging research approach requires the co-researcher and the community be granted preference in the selection of data and collection frameworks.

Many challenges of school leadership remain as the presence of mandates and other functional factors inhibit overall school and student academic progress. Useful and targeted methods identified as outcomes of this project will highlight *Piikani* school leadership knowledge as a mechanism to drive research that promotes appropriate practices with the potential of positive impacts on students, teachers, staff members, parents, and the community. This transition from bureaucratic and other school leadership orientations to a holistic, culturally-specific style will distinguish for practitioners what emerging practical approaches promote desired outcomes in schools that serve predominantly *Piikani* students. Changes in school leadership dynamics and

strategic practices will restore the transfer of *Piikani* values though the education systems

on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

CHAPTER FOUR: *PII-KANI-OMAH-TAN-IS-TAI-SSI-HPI*

"HOW WE COME TO KNOW THE UNIVERSE WORKS"

Oral traditions of Indigenous communities, like the *Piikani*, allow information to be exchanged and shared (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 1999; Pepion, 1999). As a result of this transfer of knowledge, community ties are strengthened (Bastien, 1999) and the potential for healing or implementing change is greater (Hallett et al, 2017). Stories build trust by promoting collective understandings between the storyteller and the listener (Archibald, 2008), and as a result, what is transferred is given to promote the listener's capacity to assume community responsibilities (Bastien, 1999) to support the likelihood of successful interventions (Hallett et al, 2017). Capturing the stories and experiences of *Noonaki* is based on the widely accepted community knowledge dissemination frameworks (Frances IV & Munson, 2017), where relationality forms a critical bond between the researchers (Wilson, 2008) to enable transferring of knowledge, which has been done continuously since time immemorial (Bastien, 2004; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992). While situating the work of the researcher and *Noonaki's* collaboration in this project, both parties recognized themselves as placing stories (Archibald, 2008) into the context of the community needs (Chillisa, 2015); therefore, experiences can guide processes undertaken and help to determine research impacts and outcomes (Hallett et al, 2017; Grande, 2005) this project might have on the educational systems of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. As the data from this project was interpreted and analyzed, it is well understood through the Community-Centered Digital Storywork (CCDS) framework that

storytelling (Stanton, Ricciardelli & Hall, 2017), whether in phrases, statements, or

claims, be intended for the reader to reflect and apply their own understanding to the

information being shared (Bastien, 2004). In turn, the reader (or learner) can begin to

make tangible connections that equate to lessons taught for the purpose of the aforesaid

responding in an appropriate manner (Hallett et al, 2017). The use of typical academic

language, terminology, and design of the outcomes for this project, are deemphasized in

exchange for terms resonant in community vernacular, word choices, design and/or

format of this case study as preferred (Hallett et al, 2017; Frances IV & Munson, 2017)

by *Noonaki*.

<u>Case Study Overview</u>

*Noonaki's* school leadership stories are aligned to the *Piikani* values and situated

under themes that emerged from both the review of the literature and the outcomes of the

project. Researcher narratives accompanying each of *Noonaki*'s stories were derived

from the researcher's own school leadership experiences and field observation notes that

captured personal reflections of the process and conversations stemming from the

analysis of the transcription data. This project aligns cultural processes with tribally-

specific frameworks and methods as well as expands the scope in which case study

approaches can be tailored to accommodate for cultural contexts because of the use of

Indigenous research methods. The use of Indigenous Research Methods (IRM),

specifically using storytelling as a mechanism to transfer critical school leadership

knowledge, it is likely that typical qualitative (and case study) approaches would only

scratch the surface, without understanding the complexity of relationality and the

formative processes outlined in chapter 3 (Methodology). It should also be noted that the use of *Noonaki's* storytelling creates the opportunity for dialogue with the researcher, which amplifies the use of responsive research methods, as they both reflect upon shared experiences as school leaders. *Noonaki* guides the process and makes decisions that prompt the researcher to format this dissertation to best serve the community; therefore, the stories collected are not for the convenience of the academy, which places limitations on sharing and undermines the role of transfer in relaying knowledge in the *Piikani* context. It is *Noonaki's* wish to allow for all of her stories relayed to the researcher to be a part of this dissertation; therefore, the length of the case study and conventional limitations on text were not factored into the format of this case study, as *Noonaki* desired that her stories remain intact and are only to be broken apart or altered through her consent.

Only names of individuals referred to in *Noonaki's* stories will be withheld. However, the names of places where interviews were conducted or where stories originated will be used as complementary to the reader (or learner) to apply the importance of place in understanding the context of stories as they are told. *Noonaki's* stories begin with her recalling formative experiences throughout her lifetime, in which she learned and applied *Piikani* values, even though she was greatly impacted at a young age by the imposition of a Christian-based, Western-style education. It is through these experiences that she encountered traumas which resulted in many losses that compromised her own sense of self and identity. *Noonaki,* through her stories, provides critical background into her life experiences that, as she entered her adult life, served as

motivation for her to reclaim her identity and pursue her education to eventually assume

various school leadership roles on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Several of the stories

told may be graphic or unintentionally linked to individuals and/or places within the

*Piikani* community, therefore it is important to understand that this content being told is

being relayed using expectations, in an attempt to protect the authenticity of *Noonaki's*

experiences. *Noonaki* desires that her stories serve as the basis for introducing her

personal contexts in outlining her transfer of knowledge, through experiences she

provided to the researcher.

<center>*Noonaki's* School Leadership Stories</center>

Who is *Noonaki*?

      Oki (hello), my name is *Noonaki*. I was born and raised on the Blood Reserve

near Cardston, Alberta, Canada. I married an *Ampskapi Piikani* on the Blackfeet

Indian Reservation going on fifty-five years and I've lived here that long. My

name, *Noonaki,* was given to me when I was born, which is my traditional

Blackfoot childhood name. I was given the name *Ikakii* when I joined the Brave

Dog Society. This name is the name of a great-aunt that raised my dad and I spent

a lot of time with when I was younger. So, it's a privilege to have that

name…Values, I think are the most important things that should be the number

one thing in our educational system. A student needs to know these values

[referring to the *Piikani* values]. They need to be connected early in life about

these values. And kids are very, very inquisitive. We as school leaders need to

just take a step back and find out why these things are happening. Is it because they don't have or are not connected to any value systems? Understanding that they haven't been around this kind of lifestyle is important. Are they being abused at home? Is this why they're frustrated? Is this why they behave or speak inappropriately?

### *Noonaki's* Formal Education

When I was growing up the Native language was my first language. I didn't speak a word of English until I got in the boarding school. Then we switched back and forth, so I was never proficient in either language. That was really a big obstacle for me and it still is! Then the fact that I have a hearing impairment; I would mispronounce the words and I say them the way I hear them and I have to tell people like that because I've been ridiculed for that…Takes me back to the boarding school where I was raised and educated. I was educated at the St. Paul Residential School on the *Kainai* Blood Reserve. I started my education at a boarding school. I was put in the boarding school by the Christian ministers. They took me out of my parent's home as a young child. I lived in a very secure little world. Cozy little home. And when I was left at the boarding school, I entered an environment that was totally foreign to me. It was a cold, hard brick building. There was no warmth. There was no love. There was nobody there to accommodate our personal needs as children. You were there to struggle on your and find your own way. It was a school that was dictated by the Christian ministers and the Canadian government. It was a place where my parents had no

say about what kind of education I was to receive. It was a dictatorship, actually.

Their primary responsibility was to remove the Indian out of me and make me a

responsible Christian citizen. But it didn't work out. It didn't work out because my

language was ingrained in me as well as our culture and our religious traditions.

These are the things that they tried to take away from me. If we didn't do as they

wanted us to do, we were punished. Where, if you did something wrong, you got

punished for it physically and then we became physical abusers, ourselves. In our

culture, in our family, we don't do that! We're not physical; we don't beat on each

other. We don't put our people down!

A lot of us didn't have goals when we got out of the boarding schools. We didn't

know who we were! We weren't accepted by the non-Indian society. We weren't

accepted by our Native American society, our own people, because we were so

different. Their task, or rather, the Church's task, was to transform us from Native

Americans to white people. To Christianize us and to get away from our Native

American language, culture, and traditions, and so we were different people. My

world was just not very wide. It was a very narrow world that I lived in. That's

what our kids need to know! We need to expand our world gradually. We don't

have to be the smartest kid in the school system; we need to just gradually add on

to our lessons that we learn throughout it. Many of our grandparents were forced

to go to these schools. Many of our parents were forced to not speak their

language. They were afraid to, because they would be thrown in jail, if they didn't

allow their children to go to school. Or if they didn't allow the ministers to do

what was demanded of them by the Canadian government. Colonization was hard on our Native American people.

The minister made my parents leave without previously informing me that I was going to be left there to go to school. I came upstairs looking for them and they were gone!  I kept running up and down the hallways, crying, looking for my mom and dad, just in a total panic, scared to death! Then, here comes the matron and some of my relatives. They took me downstairs and the first thing she did was chopped my hair off and it was too short and my ears were big. I had long beautiful hair. Then she taped my ears. I didn't speak a word of English and I was standing in the corner forever, every day. That was my favorite spot, standing in the corner, because I talked our language. The boarding school was quite a scary place to start. We encountered so much abuse - emotional, physical, mental - and that carried through from generation to generation. We didn't have a voice in our children's education. My mom and dad didn't have a choice in what I needed to learn. It was the choice of the Anglican minister.

In those days, except during the Sun Dance, we weren't allowed to participate in our traditions. Our religious traditions were forbidden to us in the boarding schools. The dances were forbidden, too. We could only dance during the daylight hours, at one time. The government reinforced that. Books were forbidden in the St. Paul's Residential School! A lot of books were forbidden to us!  We couldn't read! They selected what we needed to read, so our world was very limited. When I got out of the boarding school, I went to an all-white Mormon school and that

was really different! When I graduated out of high school, the counselor told me to go into business education because I was not college material. That stuck in my mind and I believed I was dumb and not capable of learning…I don't know what they were afraid of, that we were going to do at night… We were forbidden to talk our language. And that's why I talked in short phrases and one or two word sentences, because we talked our language as much as we could, being sneaky. We would switch real quick to English when our matrons were within hearing distance and that way we didn't get punished or caught speaking the language. I was very, very young and I didn't know much English and then I had a hearing problem, which nobody ever discovered until I was an adult. I had ear tests that showed I had a hearing loss and nobody ever really did anything about it. So, I mispronounced words and I think that's why a lot of times I don't go into complete sentences and using words scares me a little bit, because I'm afraid to mispronounce them. I was made fun of so much when I was younger that a lot of times, I didn't talk! And to this day, I still hesitate to use foreign words as I learn new words. I can read them, I can understand them, but to speak them, I hesitate! It took me all these years to find that out because I was totally confused to be taken out of my parent's home and stuck in a boarding school. Everything was foreign to me and so terrifying! Sometimes I think that's what these kids coming to school feel; they're terrified… I went to an all-white school in Cardston, Alberta and I struggled in there because of the different environment. I hung in there and I just had the determination, I guess, or the courage to go back each day.

Our needs were not taken into consideration. That's why today, the students'

needs here in our elementary schools, are so important. Their emotional, physical,

and overall well-being is important.

### *Noonaki's* School Leadership Journey and Self-Rediscovery

I became an educator. I worked as a teacher's aide in the elementary schools and I

observed that the less fortunate students, who had learning impairments and

disabilities, they were kind of hidden in the closets and spaces where people

weren't aware of their existence. One example is the Vina Chattin School. There

was an old shower room, next to the boy's toilet and that's where I was told to

work with those students. The students were very ashamed at that situation. Other

kids would be nosy, as kids can be; when they went down to the bathrooms, they

would peak in and observe to see what was going on. My special education kids

would just bury their heads and be ashamed. I felt so sorry for them. They were

the second-class citizens. And because of that, I decided to go into special

education and go back to school when I was in my mid-forties. I could work with

these students and assist the less fortunate in our educational system, which I

didn't always agree with the structure and the formation. That's how I got into

education. When I went to get my bachelor's degree, I was on a Montana Indian

Teacher Training program. We were full time students, plus we had to work three

days a week in the Great Falls school system. It was not an easy journey, but we

all managed to complete our tasks and accomplish our goals. I went back to

Browning and I was hired. My first job was in a self-contained classroom and I

thoroughly enjoyed my year as a self-contained classroom teacher. I worked with

a group of kids, some were nonverbal and it was hard for them to communicate

and express themselves to the adults. But they could understand each other in that

classroom.

When I went on to college, by then, I knew what my problem was. In college we

had thick, thick books we had to read. There were times I would fall asleep on my

books and I swore when I got out of college, I was never going to read another

book because I was so sick of reading! Oftentimes, I was ridiculed and laughed at

because I mispronounced words, but I was determined and was not going to be a

failure. I was not going to quit. I was not going to drop out. When I went back to

school, I learned a lot of things and one of the things I learned is how to remove

myself when people were being abusive, whatever form it is: mentally, physically,

emotionally, or spiritually. I could just remove myself. I didn't have to put up with

it and I didn't have to live it… When you can talk to me and treat me like an

equal, then I'll give you my time.  And I'll be willing to assist you, but I don't

want to be pushed into a situation… I guess this is the thing that kept me going

and what I often thought of when I was a school administrator. We're all of these

individual issues our students encounter! I decided to go into special education

and go back to school, when I was in my mid-forties. I did this so I could work

with these students and assist the less fortunate in our educational system.

I was offered a position as the principal at the Kainai Middle School when I was

over there, before I came back to Browning. It was just a brand-new school. I

declined because I told her, you know I don't like middle school kids. I didn't like

my kids when they were in the middle school! They're going through so many

emotional changes and they're hard to work with. Then when I returned to

Browning, I ended up here at the Browning Middle School. I came back to

Browning because my husband was sick and I didn't have a job. I got a call from

the school administration, "…We need an assistant principal at the Browning

Middle School. Would you be interested?" So, of course, I never let an

opportunity pass me up, I said "Yes!" When I think back about it now, that alone

was an education in dealing with children. The Browning Middle School is where

I learned about survival and the behaviors of children. In the public school

system, I think there is so much outside influence that it's a difficult task. If you

see a child that's really interested in something, we need to cultivate that interest

and assist them in what it is. What is it that they want? How can we achieve this?

In our school systems now, we don't do that! We all got these books! We got to

do this, we got to follow this curriculum right to the "T", you know! It stresses

our teachers out. A lot of our students are left behind due to cultural differences in

our educational system. The values of honesty, spirituality, courage, and humility,

are the values that we use and refer to and we connect each day, or each year or

with each issue that we encounter… I left. I went to go to work at Red Crow

Community College on the *Kaiani* Blood Reserve and I thought, I don't have to

put up with this. I don't have to be abused. I don't have to be the scapegoat for all

this commotion. I just wanted to get out of here, because my husband was gone

and I was alone at home. He was at Helena at the state legislature and I thought I need to find a better place for myself.

I went to work at Red Crow Community College after my husband went to Helena as a state legislator. I was here alone and I had a chance to go home and work and at that time, my sister was the President at the college. I saw an advertisement and I put in for the job and I was interviewed and I got the position, to my surprise, because I was just kind of messing around, seeing if I could qualify for the position. I told my husband, "what am I going to do now? I got the position." He said, "Well," (since he was gone all the time), he said, "go over and go to work. You've always wanted to go back home and be with your family and get re-acquainted with them. Why don't you do it and if it doesn't work out, you can always come back." So, that's what I did, I commuted back and forth from Browning to Red Crow Community College, some like 87 miles a day, as the Native American Studies Coordinator and the Language Studies Coordinator. It basically was a sabbatical for me because I was able to learn. I learned with the students. I learned so much that I had missed out in my earlier life because of being institutionalized in the boarding school. The language, I didn't lose it, but I forgot some of the words and stuff. When I come back, I said, I worked with my elders for the whole year, I said, "give me one year and I'll speak the language fluent again." Because when I went in a meeting room, I could not speak English. I was in the habit of speaking half English and half Blackfeet because of the boarding school days. The four and half years I spent here was a real education

for me. Some days I stayed at the college, and other days I came home and stayed

in Browning. So, I was young and I could handle it, but I had to have time

management. I had to get myself up early and get on the road, because my

husband had drilled that in me, to be on time…I was pretty authoritarian because

that's all I knew in the boarding schools. Being in the public schools, being at the

middle school, working with the children and working with families has changed

me a lot for the better. It's made me a better person and I think each day I continue

to become an even a better person. So, these, the lessons I learned from the

students have been wonderful… I had high standards and I went after the goals

that I set for myself. It was not an easy task and this is what I always try to instill

in my staff, in my family and in my students. Always inquiring to them about,

what are your goals, what is it you want to do in life, what is it you want to be,

what is it you want to change, and what is stopping you? I came back and went up

to Canada for kind of like a sabbatical. I started researching and trying to get

connected with my family and who I was and that took a while and it took many,

many years to relearn on my part, who I was. I was totally infused and involved in

our ways of life and I worked with adults and not little young children, so it was

quite a change.

My husband got sick and I went back to Browning and I was hired as the assistant

principal at the Browning Middle School. And later on, I found out, that that was

the toughest schools in the state of Montana, at that time. The year I was the

assistant principal and dealing with all the discipline, I managed to get nine

credits that year and finished 14 over that summer in Bozeman. Then I was certified as a principal and I was a principal the next year. I had worked and wore many hats in the years I was with the Browning School District. Some of them were brief, then I was moved on and other times, like with the Special Education Director, I was in there for eleven years. As a school principal, I believe it was five or six years that I was the rural school principal and two and a half years at the Browning Middle School. Coming to work here at the middle school was a hands-on training for me! And it was the best training I ever had! I wasn't even really trained in the bilingual education, but I was hired and encouraged to put in for the job because I was the only certified teacher that could speak the Blackfeet language. I was enticed to putting in for the job. That was a real merry-go-round and it was really a challenging position that I got myself into. But in the end, it all worked out. They needed somebody that could organize the program and get it functional, they had some of the most brilliant people working there that knew the culture, the traditions, the songs, the language, and one of the greatest curriculum developers was there. I got the privilege of working with them. But I had to be the supervisor, and I didn't know the district's plan was to eliminate those two people from the program. I really didn't know what had transpired before I got there, but I worked there a year. We put in for a grant. I worked with a couple [names omitted] and we put in for a five-year bilingual grant to hire Native American teachers in all the school buildings, starting on our task of bringing the culture and the language into the school system. We got it funded for five-years and the ball

started rolling. We were really going good with that and had the funds then, the

following year.

The following year the superintendent approached me and wondered how many

credits it would take to get my special education supervisor's certification. I

thought, "Oh no, here we go again!" I said, "I don't know," because I really

wasn't interested. Then he said, "Well, call your advisor (at MSU-Billings)." So, I

got on the phone and they said, "You need nine credits." The superintendent

talked to me about taking this position. He said, "Well, in three years just think

about how you can boost your retirement." He offered me a salary that was very

appealing. I told him, "Well, I need to go home. I need to pray on it. I need to

think about it. I need to sleep on it and I'll come back tomorrow." So, I did that,

went home, thought about it, prayed about it. I *really* didn't want the position. So,

I thought, well, if I ask for more money, he'll drop it. So, I came back the next

morning and added $10,000 onto what he offered me. He went for it and I was

stuck, so, then I had to take the position, I couldn't back down. I ended up being

the special education supervisor for eleven years. Then, they needed a rural school

principal. They approached me and they said, "Well, you have to go to the rural

schools anyway to work with the special education kids and for meetings and

stuff. You might as well be the principal there, too." There was the Babb

Elementary School and two Hutterite colonies. So... I was a good negotiator. I

didn't want to take the summers off without pay, so I told them I would take that

position if they give me the summers with pay. Then I ended up being the rural

school principal for six years. I wore two hats. Finally, in 2010, I decided to retire. I was getting tired. Each year, the more money you make, the more responsibilities you had, the more tasks you had. I retired for two years. I had my shoulder operated on and I was off till that healed. Then, I started getting restless and I needed something to do, so I put in for the position at the college as the disabilities coordinator. I got hired. I worked there for two years and I loved the job. But then my husband got in a car wreck and he had problems walking, so I had to retire again. He asked me if I would retire and take care of him and stay home with him. That's where I'm at right now. Still in retirement.

### *Noonaki's* School Leadership Challenge

We're going to focus on leadership, school leadership. I was a school leader for many years. And most of all of the, I guess, attributes that I have as a leader, I learned on the job. I learned from the kids. I learned from the staff. I learned from other administrators. When you go into these positions, the textbooks don't always prepare you for what you're going to encounter. It could be devastating. It could be exciting. It could be scary. It could be overwhelmingly stressful. We just have to be prepared and do the best we can. If we make mistakes, we correct our mistakes, proceed, and move on. We don't focus on our mistakes anymore. We just don't have time for that in education! You acquire a lot of the stuff from your exposure to the world. You don't acquire it as a genetic thing. My belief is on that and I think scientific research will prove that too. We acquire these things through our experiences. In my personal feelings, the things that I learned when I became

an educational leader, is that we are not connected with the community, the people, the families, and with our culture you're going to struggle and you're going to fail miserably. We have people come and go, as educators, as principals, as teachers that just do not make it! They struggle because they do not have the connectedness through our value system.

Those that don't have values of compassion, spirituality, courage, and so on, to live this life, really need to find another occupation, because this is not an easy job. Because, being an administrator is not an easy job; there were times that I would have to come out here at the school by myself sit and just think about, how am I going to handle this situation? What is the best way to handle this situation? What resources do I have? Who can I count on? Because I can't do it alone. There is nobody that can do everything themselves. We all need each other. We need each other's support and assistance!  These virtues of our culture are coming back and I see it being practiced more and more, again today. There's so many factors that you deal with as an educational leader that are so important and it's not just the academics, the curriculum, or the sports.

Our culture started coming back. And with it, came a great sense of pride. I sit here today thinking, well, I was a part of this revival. I'm a part of these kids finding out who they are and going from there and enjoying their lifestyle, enjoying their history, enjoying their freedom, from being controlled by people that were not Indian. We talk, I see where people want to make English the only language, but I think it's important to speak our native language and it's really

difficult because our families don't speak it. Very few people and all the elders

that spoke it are mostly deceased. A lot of them are gone and there's very few left

that speak the language and to converse with somebody is difficult. I don't even

know who I am. I'm so acculturated. I wasn't accepted by the white population

and I wasn't accepted by the traditional Indians. We were just kind of lost,

bouncing around, in between both worlds. So, that was an eye opener and I

thought, well, maybe I need to change some things. I never thought of it, because

my lifestyle was just about survival. Just surviving from day to day when I didn't

really know who I was… I could go on talking on and on about being an

educational leader, but I became an educational leader without much background.

My background came mostly from family life, my life, my own background.

*Noonaki's* introduction to her stories explains the complexities associated with her

life experiences, professional development, and cultural identity. Her key motivations for

assuming school leadership roles on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation go beyond

*Piikaniomahtanistaissihpi* or "How We Come to Know How the Universe Works," as

*Noonaki* assesses her own understanding of the *Piikani* values and connects them to the

themes that arose from the review of literature (Chapter 2). This has allowed for the

researcher to develop narratives that amplify *Noonaki's* transfer of knowledge, into

relatable anecdotes that connect her experiences to what other school leaders have to

know or will encounter as they assume these critical roles in the educational systems of

the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. *Noonaki* is poised to also provide clarity into what

community expectations are of school leaders, as they pertain to the *Piikani* values and

the integration of the Blackfeet Education Standards (2005) framework into the

curriculum, operations, and services provided to *Piikani* students in these schools.

Following this chapter, are seven chapters (5-11) that each identify, qualify, and narrate

examples of school leadership as aligned to the *Piikani* values of honesty, respect,

generosity, spirituality, courage, humility, and compassion. *Noonaki* begins with

*Okamotsitapiyiisin* or "living righteous," as a value that supports school leaders in

gaining the honest trust of their stakeholders and the community at-large.

CHAPTER FIVE: *OKA-MOTSI-TAAPI-YII-SIN*

[HONESTY] OR "LIVING RIGHTEOUS"

*Noonaki's* stories begin with the *Piikani* concept of honesty and its role in guiding school leadership practices. Honesty and its general understanding, have been greatly altered from its original meaning in the *Piikani* culture; therefore, it has transformed itself from a measurement of an individual's integrity, to a concept that when used, involves restraint when facing situations and personalities in complex school systems. *Noonaki* describes honesty as:

The "right way of living" is the interpretation of *okamotsitapiyiisin* [honesty]. Do what's right is an interpretation! Today, we do things to satisfy our needs, our egos. Oftentimes we'll pick that over doing what's right. Because we're in a whole different society, a whole different time frame. Honesty goes way back in our history, you know. You had to be an honest person, because if you weren't and your offense had to be pretty severe, you were banished from your band or tribe. They'd break away and if you were dishonest or did things to hurt the people, you weren't accepted. You were ostracized and you had to leave and it was a very, very big dishonor or humiliating position to find yourself. So, honesty was always a very desired virtue amongst us. I think you learn it from your families, your daily activities, and from your elders. Elders really stress a lot of these in their efforts to revive our culture and traditions. These are some of the virtues that they want our children to learn. I think it's a very difficult task to ask a young child to

be honest when we have so much dishonesty going on around us. Especially when

we have people in power that aren't respectful of other people or even of

themselves. If they don't even like themselves, how can they respect people?

Our culture has changed so much today. Honesty is often not a virtue people

practice. I was a product of the boarding schools and honesty was drilled into me.

We were scared into being honest. I was honest to a point that some people said

that I was to a fault. I always thought it was a virtue.

<u>Transparency</u>

School leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation need to have a requisite skills

set to determine how information is disseminated and to whom. Transparency is critical

in helping stakeholders understand the school from the respective roles of teachers, staff

members, students, parents, and community members in supporting openness to concerns

they may have. *Noonaki* notes that school leaders have a primary responsibility to the

students, then the teachers and staff, then on to the parents and community. The

community elects the school district's governing board who, as a body (not an

individual), acts upon the consent of the community. School leaders, whether directly or

indirectly, need to respond when requested by the district's entire governing body's

request for information about their school according to *Noonaki*. Governing board

members may attempt to get information or specific details, in which they have an

interest in knowing from the school leader; however, a school leader's exercise of

restraint in relaying information to a sole or a few governing board members is critical,

especially when requested outside of their established quorum of their scheduled (or special) meetings. The school leader's goal in reporting to members of their school's governing body is to enlighten board members and the community about challenges they face. Sometimes this means highlighting good things as well as being frank when discussing concerns where action is requested by the school leader. As *Noonaki* recalls in this story:

> In the Browning Middle School, the superintendent had no idea what went on there! They sit in the school administrative office and make the decisions about this and that. They need to be more active and involved in the school system! Problems that I had here, at the Browning Middle School, were not just the students, as the staff can be a handful too!  If they don't buy into what you want them to do, then they're just like kids.  They can be stubborn and refuse to do things and make excuses. We have a lot of abuse in our community. And we have, oftentimes swept it under the rug and do not deal with the issues and causes of abuse. A lot of the previous principals didn't want to even touch some of these things that were occurring. They'd rather just sweep it under the rug and forget about it! Just like the time I brought weapons that were confiscated here to the administrative office during a board meeting. The sheriff and local law enforcement officers were in there too and I showed them what all was in that box. They were just amazed and flabbergasted because of the things that the students brought to school. The safety of the students was my number one priority. A lot of the teachers deal with behaviors, and trying to teach the students

appropriate behaviors is difficult because they don't have that structure in their

home system. The school board wasn't aware of much because this was an

isolated place, like they say, "What happened in the middle school stayed in the

middle school!" Because they didn't want the parents or community to know.

Today, the parents don't take the time, I don't think, to teach their children right

and wrong. It's easier to just overlook things and brush them and sweep them

under the rug, instead of dealing with issues head on.

The pressure is on for school leaders to perform, know, and be transparent about

what is going on at their school. *Noonaki* recalls, sometimes in order to resolve issues,

school leaders are not immune to lying to avoid consequences. Lies are a short term fix

for a problem that could have been exposed, responsibility from culpable parties that

could have been accepted, and potentially a crisis that could have been avoided if the

school leader was honest. School leaders who lie to their stakeholders, including students,

face the possibility of them not being trusted if exposed. *Noonaki* says that for a school

leader who "finds themselves in this situation, the road to redemption is acceptance that

they were wrong to lie and a commitment to those they were dishonest to that they have

accepted the consequences and learned their lesson." Overtime, it is possible that the lie

that was told won't follow the school leader if they actively work to build their own

awareness and recognizably change their behavior to repair the damage that was caused,

as evident in *Noonaki's* two stories:

We accepted, as part of our connection into learning, and we have to have all

these values needed in order to be a competent successful person. We were never

perfect! We're not perfect people. I'm not perfect, far from perfect! Oftentimes, children will lie and are not honest, because they are fearful of the outcome. And if they know the outcome is not going to be severe, then they're not going to lie. Honesty is one of the toughest things, because these kids learn early in life to avoid the truth because of consequences. But, you know, society will often make you pay for your mistakes, but as a person, you have to learn, say okay, and then you move on! Oftentimes, we fail at that, too! I remember one incident when I made a big lie. And boy, people still referred to that mistake I made, they never moved on! But I moved on. I paid the consequence for that lie and I thought, "Oh! I'll never do that again!" Even though the lie came out because I was fearful of the outcome. We accepted this, as part of our connection into learning, we have all these values in order to be a competent successful person.

Some of these incidents and stories, nobody knew about. If they knew about it, they kept quiet, they didn't mention it. They didn't bring it out. But these are the things that administrators deal with oftentimes, maybe on a daily basis. If you're not honest with the parents and their children, then children are not going to be honest with anybody else. They're going to follow the example that's set before them.

In isolated communities such as the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, *Noonaki* stresses that school leaders are at the front lines in making sense of community dynamics and their impact on student behaviors and issues. It was perceived as foreign to our community that adolescents were being enticed into exhibiting gang behaviors which

were becoming more and more evident in student behaviors at the school. School leaders

need to seek help in having the ability to rely on community knowledge to understand

conditions or situations that lead to such behaviors, as *Noonaki* states in this story:

> I talked to my husband about the gang activities at that time. He said "Oh no,
>
> there's no gang activities here in Browning. It's just wannabes." I said, "There is!
>
> They might be wannabes, but there are gang activities here in Browning. I have
>
> students come into my office and ask if they could wait after school, because they
>
> didn't want to go home immediately with all the other kids." I said "Why?" They
>
> said, "Well, because we get beat up by those gang members.  They get us after
>
> school. "What I like to do…," one kid told me, "…is wait till they're all gone and
>
> they're in their homes. Then I make a dash to my house!" Even my husband
>
> wouldn't believe that there were gang activities here. When that one kid went to
>
> court for manslaughter, vehicular manslaughter, for killing that student [name
>
> omitted] I was talking about, he asked me to write a letter of reference for him. I
>
> thought about it a long time and I thought, "*well, you know, he was, a gang*
>
> *member"* and I stipulated in the letter to the judge that this was what was
>
> happening here and they [gangs] were cruel and mean to children. They joined
>
> these gangs to protect themselves. If they didn't join, then they were beat up and
>
> other things happened to them. So they would join these so-called gangs to keep
>
> themselves safe. I think that's [reference letter] what kept him out of jail! Later
>
> on, the parents thanked me.

Whether or not adolescent gang activity is able to be confirmed by the school leader, *Noonaki* suggests that they have to be upfront and transparent with students, teachers, staff, district leadership, parents, and the community about bullying behaviors that are typically associated with or can be perceived as gang activity. School leaders are also entrusted to develop the response to maintain the safety and security of the school and the people in it, a principal concern of *Noonaki's*, as she articulates this nuance:

> Those bullies [who were known to be gang members] were in the classroom right over here, where I could keep an eye on them! They were pretty sneaky. They'd bring in weapons, like those little blades and those box cutters. They brought those in! They had all kinds of sneaky little weapons that they used to intimidate the students into doing what they wanted them to do. There was a fight and it was two friends. Two kids that had been friends all their lives were made to fight each other. When the parents came in, one of the parents told me, "Well, I knew it was going to happen!" I said "Really! Well, how did you know?" They said, "Well, it happens every spring, you know. These kids are made to fight. They called my kid a nerd and I knew he had to fight his friend at the end of the school year." I said, "Why didn't you let me know? Why didn't you tell me? We could have prevented it!" We had to be proactive, instead of reactive in situations like these. Also, we had to keep the staff safe! With the gang activity some of the staff members were afraid. Afraid of the students! Before I came here, I guess there was a big fight in the gym between two families and was really violent. They had brass knuckles and knives and so forth. Luckily, I missed that!

The community of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation and its corresponding information are not necessarily accessible or shared openly in a transparent manner. *Noonaki* cautions that some information received by a school leader is exceptionally sensitive and not worthy of sharing outside of people who need to know it. *Noonaki* recognizes that, although parents are not always at their best, their concerns are warranted and should be taken seriously and held in confidence by the school leader. Actions undertaken by the school leader need to ensure that information about students, and that is shared by their parents, is to be protected and that only those with the capacity to know or help are made aware. *Noonaki* describes one instance when she is faced with a difficult situation, where she had to share sensitive information about a student to their parents:

> The parents that was always getting us hauled down here [school administration], who had students that were always in trouble in school because of the drinking and the activities that the parents were involved in. There were times that we were brought down to the superintendent's office and the parents reeked of alcohol. We could hardly stand to be in that room! But we had to sit there and listen to the complaints and the games that were going on. I thought, to me, it was a waste of time, because we knew what was going on. We knew what was happening! The sad part about it was the parents had some beautiful daughters and it was understandable that they were concerned about their daughters. The girls were safe here at the middle school! They came to school here in a safe environment, they had food, and they had warmth. They had people they could talk to when things were rough at home. What happened is, girls were being enticed into gang

activity. They got gang raped and beat up as part of their initiation. I was so sad to

be aware of that and not be able to stop it. We didn't know really what to do or

how to stop it! The counselors worked with them here, but we couldn't go into the

community or into the homes to see what was going on.

For school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, with the majority of the

student population being *Piikani* students, *Noonaki* says it is important to be cognizant of

issues and viewpoints surrounding race. In an attempt to make education more equitable,

teachers and staff in the schools need to be supportive of the needs of *Piikani* students

without exhibiting behaviors that could impact the way anyone of them responds to the

students. The school leader is responsible for protecting the student's interests, and this

applies to the behaviors and tendencies exhibited by teachers and staff that are hired.

*Noonaki* recalls as a school leader, encountering staff members who did illegal or devious

things while working, therefore, it is up to the school leader to decide the course of action

in relaying such information and acting accordingly to gather facts that could lead to

termination. The school leader has to also weigh their options if they cannot garner

support as they climb the chain of command, as when *Noonaki* was faced with such an

issue, which could have become more dangerous and student safety could have been

compromised if not addressed:

> We had another teacher who came from back east. I think pretty much the same
>
> area that our superintendent at the time came from. One of the computer
>
> technologists got into his computer and saw that he was communicating with the
>
> Ku Klux Klan at the Browning Middle School! I went and I talked to him. I said,

"That's not allowed here! You can do it at your own time, at your own place, not here at the middle school!" I reported it to the superintendent and they told me not to say a word to anybody. I disobeyed the superintendent! I went to one of the school board members and said "I think you folks need to be aware of what was going on! We have a person that's involved with the Ku Klux Klan working with minorities and Indian students. All I could think was, what is he up to? What is he doing here?

School leaders are also responsible for the actions of their employees. When an action of a teacher or staff member is not becoming of an educator, and according to *Noonaki*, "when proper tactics are not used, or policies are not followed," it falls upon the school leader to hold people accountable for their actions. In personnel matters especially, transparency is limited by law as to how much information you can share about teachers and staff. In such cases, *Noonaki* urges school leaders to ensure that his or her actions are within the realm of their responsibility to ensure fairness for the teacher or staff member entrenched in a controversy. Most complaints will not be followed up on by accusers, but others could end up in legal proceedings with the school leader on trial for what they did and did not do, which *Noonaki* describes in this story:

I had another incident where a staff member got me called into the Head Start administration. One of the specialty staff members was accused of dragging a child by the hand and twisted it back like that [hand motion] from the classroom, out into the open area. This kid was screaming and crying and the parents were really upset. They were going to sue and turn her into child protection. I was her

supervisor, so I was called into the meeting. I couldn't really protect her or argue for her and I couldn't speak for the child, because I wasn't there. The incident happened a month before the complaint was filed and my question was, "Why didn't the person that witnessed this immediately report it to the person in charge?" She didn't report it to the person in charge and a month later she ran into the parent and mentioned it to the parent. The parent became unglued and was on the fight! It was a matter of protecting the child and protecting the staff member, because procedure wasn't followed properly. I couldn't reprimand her! We made documentation of the meeting and of the incident, because the person that reported it wasn't there. We had to let it go!

School leaders are not always able to resolve issues out of their immediate control; therefore, accepting things that are out of his or her hands goes with the territory. *Noonaki* emphasizes that being able to weigh the issue and exercise only what is in the school leader's capacity to reasonably do helps teachers and staff members to recognize his or her limitations and halts attention to matters that are moot. It is likely that within their school, the school leader can take measures and have conversations with teachers and staff members to build awareness as to how they can respond to issues that arise. *Noonaki* asserts that the school leader has to recognize whether or not they have the authority to stop what is happening:

But one incident where, a woman was a staff member for many years and worked with little children as a speech and language pathologist. Well, she retired and quit. Then she started her own business and then she was going into the schools

and taking the children into an office away from the schools. My biggest concern

was the liability and the safety of these children. I tried to stop her and she hired a

local lawyer. The Montana School Board Association lawyer was there when we

had the big meeting. They, in fact, they helped her write up a plan that was legally

appropriate. However, I couldn't tell them that she was abusive to these children

because we didn't have any witnesses. She wasn't prosecuted. It didn't go any

further than that meeting on pushing that she was turned into child protection,

because I couldn't check it out, being a confidential issue. To my knowledge, she

is still taking kids out to her office and her assistant is her son. I worry about those

kids, even to this day, thinking about knowing her and knowing what she had

done. But because of the lack of documentation and not following proper

procedures, she was able to continue working with young children.

## Communication

School leadership, according to *Noonaki*, is primarily enacted by means of

communication, relaying information to stakeholders, articulating the leader's vision, and

setting an expectation for others to follow by modeling effective communication.

### Students

School leaders need to know how to communicate with students. It is through

their interactions with students that school leaders can act as a model for students to

express themselves in ways that assist in their success, as well as give feedback into how

the school can better support them. *Noonaki* emphasizes this in these two stories:

Communication is so important and when you're working with little kids, you've

got to communicate to them. You've got to explain things to them. The kids that

are valued as human beings and treated with respect seem to thrive a lot better

than those that don't come out of it. You know, communication is so important

and when you're working with little kids, you've got to communicate to them.

You've got to explain things to them! We just label kids saying, "Oh, he's lazy.

Oh, he's disruptive. Oh, he's a behavior problem." We don't sit down and talk with

the children. Education is about communication. And we don't communicate with

these kids. Do we sit down and ask them, can you tell me what the problem is?

When they do tell you the problem, can we come up with a solution? Can you

come up with a solution? I think these are important things in our educational

system.

I can remember when we were little kids, at night time, we didn't have television,

we didn't have all the electronics that we have today, the technology. At

nighttime, after it was bedtime, we went to bed, because it was story telling time.

Our grandparents would tell us a story or our parents and we'd listen to the story

until we fell asleep and that was common and soothing. So, anymore, nobody tells

stories anymore. That's something that we're lacking anymore, is the

communication, to communicate, to take the time to communicate with people.

They [students] were communicating and education is about communication,

including in times of transition. When we stop kids from visiting or talking

abruptly, then they're not going to feel comfortable in the school system or with

their teachers. This will carry over into the classroom, and when requested they might not get up and speak to express their knowledge to other people.

Teachers and Staff

A school leader's style of communication should ensure that expectations are met by both teachers and staff to collectively assist one another in supporting student learning, according to *Noonaki*. Communication among each teacher and staff member is also critical in recognizing their responsibility to ensure students are aware of expectations. *Noonkai* also notes that teacher to staff member communication (and vice versa) is important when potentially mitigating conflicts that stem from collective inconsistencies in shared expectations, that can lead to both groups not supporting one another, as *Noonaki* briefly describes in this story:

> The cooks and the teachers supported each other, because if the kids didn't get to finish their meals if they were visiting too much it was not seen as a problem but as something that was good.

Parents

Communication with parents is critical to including them in the education of their students. *Noonaki* calls upon school leaders to be aware if students are having problems at school, especially if they will not comply with rules designed to keep the school orderly. Parents can be school leaders' greatest allies; therefore, sound parental relations can assist in preventative measures that are geared toward keeping a student out of trouble or from not being successful in school. *Noonaki* explains this in a story:

Most kids that are attention deficit disorder are usually medicated, if it's severe

enough. By the time they get to the middle school, they no longer want their

medication and oftentimes they get into self-medicating. We had several of our

attention deficit students here that refused to take their meds. We worked with the

parents! I'm a firm believer in that.

## Relational Trust

Education is closely tied to relationships and trust. Within a school, according to

*Noonaki*, a school leader is responsible for assisting stakeholders in facilitating relational

trust among them in the interest of accomplishing goals and supporting student success.

Relational trust is also important in formalizing relationships with other entities within

and outside of the community that can also be a part of supporting students' needs.

*Noonaki* relates school board interference happening as a result of a breakdown in

relational trust and vertical articulation of exceptions between the governing body of the

district and the school leader(s). School leaders need to understand the role of the

governing body, the limitations of their members' "powers," and that they too need to

adhere to district policies pertaining to chain of command. *Noonaki* provides two stories

that explain this complex issue:

The thing about it is that the school board would make decisions and reprimand

staff members and the administrators over this and that. They weren't in the

middle of it and they had no idea what was going on! A lot of it was hearsay! I

used to get pretty annoyed with them when they'd sit in the administrative offices.

I had a couple teachers that their kids were here at the Browning Middle School and favoritism was their biggest downfall. They favored the cowboys because their families were cowboys. They expected their kids to have special favors! In the mornings, the kids had to stay in the gym or in the cafeteria. But no, they'd go to the gym and take these kids, walk them through to their classroom and then they could stay in their classroom to do whatever they wanted to do. They tried to segregate their students and give them priorities on a lot of things and I didn't agree with that because I felt like all the kids should be treated alike and fairly. One day, that teacher was bringing students in and I was in that pod and I put my hand out and I said, "No, they need to go back to the gym!" One of the student's dad was on the school board. I don't know if the teacher is the one that told the dad that I hit his son, but when I went like this [hand motion to prevent students from going any further], I hit him! The gentleman came to see me and said, "Well, I was told you hit my son!" I said, "No, I didn't! I put my hand out and I went like this [hand motion] and said, "You need to go back into the gym, where the rest of the kids are!" He said, "Well my son don't lie!" I defended myself saying, "Well, I didn't lie! I'm not lying either!" So I decided that I wasn't going to argue with him. He, regardless of what I said, he was going to believe what the teacher and his son said. It created, I guess, a lot of stress for me!

School leaders need to be sensitive to the concerns of their teachers as a show of a trusting relationship. However, as *Noonaki* warns school leaders, teachers [and other staff] can betray that trust through their action(s) or inaction which can reflect on the

school leader, especially if they are intending to objectively address a concern from other teachers, students, staff, parents, and community members. *Noonaki* recalls one story of her being betrayed:

> Teachers set me up for failure too! We went on a field trip and a couple teachers came and reported to me that one of the students would not take his cap off in respect for other people in the audience. We were sitting in the audience watching a video. I asked the student to take his cap off. When we came back, there was a dance and I told him he couldn't go to the dance because of his disrespect. The mother was on the fight! I called the complaining teacher in and I said, "Well, you complain about him refusing to take his cap off. You referred him to me and his mother is saying that he did take his cap off." She said, "I had no problem with it! He took his cap off!" I responded saying, "Oh my god! What's going on here?" I was being set up for failure and was being tested and I thought, "Well, gee, you know, if these people were adults and seriously concerned about the education and well-being of students, why are they behaving like this? I shouldn't have to deal with behaviors like this!"

School leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation operate schools in conjunction with the presence of teacher unions and classified staff unions. This relationship between schools and unions was forged out of conflict, with teachers and classified staff desiring representation on workplace and legal matters they experienced stemming from a lack of trust between them and the school district. *Noonaki* defines the line between the role of unions in dictating school policies and school functions as being razor thin, as school

leaders often have to make the determination between demands that will improve the
workplace for teachers (and staff members) and those changes that are reasonable to
supporting students in a high poverty community. Under the Blackfeet Tribal
Employment Rights Ordinance (TERO), Section 3-107 (pg. 27), unionization is a
"prohibited" exercise. In Section 9-101 – 106 (pg. 57-58) of the TERO ordinance, the
Blackfeet Tribe enacted the "Freedom to Work Without Joining a Labor Union Act,"
outlining limitations on union activities, including not making employment conditional
upon union membership (nor preventing them from joining unions either), not requiring
employees to pay union dues, and not restricting benefits or fringe to employees who are
not part of a union. *Noonaki* recognized that public schools on the Blackfeet Indian
Reservation are not funded by the tribe, therefore, relations with teachers and staff
include union representation, whether they join or not. School leaders may find that their
relationships with teachers and staff may be compromised or made more challenging if
the union becomes involved in an issue, as *Noonaki* relates this in a story:

> It wasn't an easy position coming into Browning Middle School. Later on, I found
> out Browning Middle School was considered the toughest middle school in
> Montana! I thought, "Oh my goodness, that's what I stepped into?" Nobody
> forewarned me or anything! Browning Public Schools gets pretty desperate to
> find people that can do the job.  I had teachers that really tested me and tried me! I
> had an excellent math teacher and he could speak the Piikani language, he could
> count in the language because he went to the classes.  He was just an awesome
> person! When he became the union representative, we had a problem with a staff

member and I had to counsel the staff person.  I called her in and she wanted the

union representative to be in the office. He came unglued! He was screaming and

yelling at me and I thought, "Holey moley!" He was trying to intimidate me!  He

was a big man, too! I sat there and I told him, "I don't have to put up with this!

You can leave anytime you want to! You're not going to sit here and yell at me!"

I made him leave my office and I reported him to the superintendent and I said

"I'm not putting up with that! He hasn't got the right to be yelling and screaming

at me!" He was supposed to sit in the meeting and make sure that everything is

handled properly, the discipline, the problem, and if the consequence was in line

with the policies and procedures. He's not supposed to come unglued and start

yelling, screaming at me, or trying to intimidate me! That was one incident that

was a little bit offhand and I handled it fine. Later on, him and I became pretty

good friends.  But the other thing he'd do in his spare time, instead of planning his

lessons or correcting papers he'd be playing poker on his computer. I'd walk into

his classroom and I'd have to remind him that his planning period is for working

on what you're supposed to be working on. He just tested me and tried me all the

time to see how I was going to handle things.

Parent-teacher relations are about trust. The parents convey this trust by sending

their students to school, often holding school leader, teacher, and staff members to higher

standards than they tend to hold for themselves, as *Noonaki* recalls, especially how

parents behaved when confronted with the school. The student is the focal point for most

disagreements school leaders will encounter with parents. Parents understandably have

the instinct to protect their students; therefore, school leaders have to be positioned to respond to potentially violent actions from either party, according to *Noonaki,* in this story:

> The teachers and the parents would have problems too!  I had one parent come in here with a baseball bat and was going to beat up a teacher. In the classroom! I had to stop her and I had to call the police! She was a very non-violent person, according to the superintendent, she knew her in school and she was not a violent person. I never heard of her being a violent person.  But because of the way the teacher treated her son, she became very angry and aggressive and it was hard for me to have to call the police. I had her escorted out, but I could understand why she was mad!

School leaders need to put a lot of trust in their teachers and staff to responsibly undertake their role within the school. This sacred trust can lead to someone taking advantage of the school and its resources. *Noonaki* witnessed the management of other schools as sometimes being problematic when it involved another school leader creating situations that arise from their actions. The school leader, acting on behalf of all students, teachers, staff members, and the community, has to ensure that a decision does not place school resources at jeopardy and that people who betray this trust are held accountable. *Noonaki* describes this in a story:

> I had one person come in as a substitute from a non-teaching profession to Babb Elementary School. She had a key, she had access to the building on weekends and she abused that privilege. Next thing, her family and her husband were using

the shop for working on people's automobiles during the weekend and using the

school equipment. That became a problem because I had to ask her for her key

back. We do a lot of things that are not right! The main thing is to correct the

things that are not working, that are in need of improvement. We all need

improvement, every day of our lives!

I went through a lifetime and I started to find out that people were not being

honest. It's hard to teach it nowadays, as far as our culture is concerned, but you

have to start when children are little. Honesty, I believe, is passed on from

generation to generation. Little children watch and see everything you do, they

imitate what they hear, what they see, and when they see you being dishonest,

then, they're going to be dishonest. If they see you being honest, they'll think

twice about being dishonest.

School leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation experience challenges in

garnering support for initiatives that are intended to improve student learning, from all

stakeholders. This is especially true in the case of integrating *Piikani* culture and

language into the curriculum, asserts *Noonaki*. The challenge is to enable all who are

involved by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and reasoning they need to act.

Some will follow, others will not. The learning needs of the students require the focus

that enables the teachers and staff members to conform to new and innovative ideas,

whether they want to do them or not, a common challenge *Noonaki* faced in her role as a

school leader, as she shares in this story:

In order for the teachers to buy into to what you're trying to do, you have to sell the program! I think back on the bilingual program when the school administration got funding and just needed somebody to do the job. I always thought it wasn't complete buy-in because it didn't get supported 100%! The same thing goes on in the school buildings. I had teachers that had been out here for years and years and they just were used to doing things their way and change is not easy to accomplish. When you want to change the system and the way people do things, you have a bunch of complainers, resistance, jealousy, and animosity that goes on with the educators. There were times I thought, "…my, they're a bigger problem than the kids, you know!

Maintaining a high degree of parental trust is an essential part of the school leader's relationship with parents and the community. *Noonaki* contends that school leaders cannot assume that parents are aware of or know how to actively participate in their student's education. She also recalls as a school leader, that she was called upon to model for others in the school (and the district) actions that are intended to be mutually beneficial to the academic growth of the students when including parents. Parents may respond by pulling their children out of school to solve issues, only to experience the same rules and regulations in another school or district. *Noonaki* suggests acting in good faith on behalf of the students and their parents requires that school leaders be responsive to sensitive issues; therefore, she also had to be cognizant of student and parent rights to ensure the school is doing all it can to meet student needs, as *Noonaki* relays in these two stories:

The other incident with this superintendent. He was kind of a strange person! This is the year I became principal and they hired a local lady to be the assistant principal of Browning Middle School. He'd call us down to his office and we'd have to sit there and watch him and the special education director play mind games with the parents. Anytime a parent had a complaint about the middle school, we had to go down there and sit in his office and watch his mind games when we should have been up at the middle school, making sure things were fine. We'd sit there and the special education director would demonstrate how we're supposed to act to parents that were angry and complaining. How we're supposed to sit and smile, just listen, and be cordial. This was interesting.

I was standing here [Browning Middle School], in this corner right here, and this girl walked by with her coat on and I said, "Please take your coat off. She said F-you. I said, I'm not putting up with that. So I grabbed her coat and her and I walked in there in the office and I called her parents. She knows that's a school regulation rule to take her coat off. She had ample time to take her coat off and I don't have to put up with that kind of language. I refuse to put up with it. Her mother was really angry saying, "I'm taking her out of school! I'm taking her to Heart Butte and put her in there." I said, "Well, that's your choice. These are the rules that we have here, and I'm not going to let her get by and away with it, because other students were watching. I was being tested royally. So, she took her child out of school, put her in the Heart Butte school, two days later, she was back! Two days later, she was back, because she didn't like Heart Butte. Maybe

they were tougher out in Heart Butte. We had another kid come from Heart Butte

and he was a big kid! He got teased at Heart Butte and he was getting into

fistfights and so his mother brought him in and he wanted to go to school here

[Browning Middle School]. Well, the situation didn't change. He still got teased

here because he was big and he was still trying to beat up kids because they were

making fun of him and laughing at him, just being cruel. Kids can be cruel

sometimes. He didn't know how to handle that. Instead of learning how to handle

it and letting the school counselors work with him on how to handle the situation,

the mother thought if she moved him to another school, it was going to change. It

didn't!  He encountered the same thing here and he didn't last a week. Then he

was back at Heart Butte. We don't try to seek the help that's available. We jump to

conclusions and we try to solve things on our own that just don't work or are not

appropriate. In both incidences, the kids were right back to where the problem

started in a day or two.

At the classroom level, teacher-student rapport is an indicator as to how much

trust exists and can provide a window into how a lack of trust can impact a student's

likelihood of success. School leaders need to recognize teacher traits and practices that

are beneficial to *Piikani* learners as well as identify things that teachers do or do not

that could result in them not being successful with students. *Noonaki* describes this in

these three stories:

We have some fine teachers. We have some young people that are so smart, so

well-educated. I went into a classroom when my great-granddaughter was in the

elementary and I was just amazed at the captive audience that this teacher had. The kids were all sitting around on the floor, not sitting at their desks. It was reading time and she just had an amazing way of interacting with her kids. The kids were just happy to be learning! It wasn't a struggle. It wasn't a painful experience. I sat in there and watched the teacher through the whole period. She was a Native American teacher and certainly an outstanding teacher because she could relate to those students. She knew what made those students comfortable. She just had a good rapport with them.

A lot of times our teachers don't have that! We had a teacher here at the middle school, who was an ex-alcoholic, had very little patience with the kids, and had a hot, mean temper. There were two desks sitting close together and this kid had his hand in between them. The kid didn't do what he wanted him to do and the right away, so he just slammed that desk to the other one and squished his hand between the two desks. I had to write him up and recommend that he not be rehired.

When you pull favoritism in schools, kids are aware of it. So, when you're dishonest, they're aware of it right now. I had a friend, a long time language teacher. He taught bilingual education, with total physical response. He'd have his toys and his vehicles and everything for the kids, hands on. He'd tell them, "Pick this up. This is a car [Blackfeet]. This is a bird. This is that." He'd have them sitting around in a circle. He said one day he was in a room with a bunch of little kids. One little guy was wandering around and he was touching this and touching

that. He didn't stop him. He just let him go. After the class was over, he decided to talk to this little guy. So, he brought him in and he started asking him questions. He knew all the answers. He was internalizing. He was listening as he was walking around. This was a real little child in early Head Start. So, when we get back to, honestly, I think you learn it from your families, your daily activities, and from your elders. Elders really stress a lot of these in their efforts to revive our culture and traditions back. These are some of the virtues that they want our children to learn.

If promoting relational trust is challenging within a district or school, outside services and influences independent of the school can be equally challenging entities on which to build trust. *Noonaki* insists that trust can fade if the school and outside entities cannot coordinate efforts to promote the best and needed services for students, especially for those who are gifted and talented or in special education. As a school leader, protecting the student was a priority for *Noonaki*, and if concerns arise then it is incumbent upon them to act if they feel a student's education is being compromised. School leaders have to be prepared to recognize and attempt to work out concerns to the best of their ability, as objections may be warranted by professional incompetence or questionable practices (by any stakeholder). *Noonaki* cautions school leaders not to expect that responses to objections will be met with intellectual or practical reasoning, as everything you do as a school leader is ripe for criticism even when faced with unrelated factors, as *Noonaki* describes in these next two stories:

There are a lot of things that I encountered in our school district as an administrator that are outside of the realm of educating students. The safety of the students always comes first! We [*Noonaki* and another former teacher] had been good friends at one time. But when I stepped in to stop her from taking these children out, our friendship was gone! We no longer associate with each other. She's still angry with me! Her personal goal was to make money and set up a business.  My interest in this was the safety of the students. We run into a lot of incidents that we have no control over or have no support. Legally she had the support because these kids were taken out for medical reasons and they were special education kids with speech problems or impairments, they could be classified as medically needy. A kid can be taken up to the hospital for ear exams, when they're having hearing problems, that's the way they defeated us and that's how she was successful. The lawyers brought that out and one of our local lawyers said, "Well, you take kids out to go to basketball games!" That year that we were trying to get attendance to meet Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind mandate. The attendance was supposed to be ninety percent; that was our goal!  I think it was eighty-five or some percent, but I thought, "Oh my god, that's two different things! Two totally different issues.

They [parents of a student] had a child in the special education and they claimed that the child didn't get services that she was entitled to. They did end up getting dollars from the school district and when I think back about it now, that was their ultimate motive, behind all of this, was to sue and get some finances from the

district and I have no concrete facts to back that up. I thought, that was what it

was all about. Then the whole town was mad at them and they had to move.

*Noonaki* creates a contextual understanding of the concept of *okamotsitapiyiisin*

or "living righteous" as she notes that school leaders' responsibilities are not immune to

their truth being challenged with a lie or dishonest behavior that result from a profound

lack of appropriate transparency, practices of poor communication, and sometimes non-

existent relational trust among school stakeholders. Honesty and trust are the precursors

to the *Piikani* concept of *Ainnakowe* or as *Noonaki* emphasizes, "it shows" as a sign of

respect. As a school leader, integrity is tied to his or her stakeholders' and community's

notions that demonstrate the fulfillment of this value.

CHAPTER SIX: *AIN-NAK-OWE*

[RESPECT] OR "IT SHOWS"

*Noonaki's* next stories expand to the *Piikani* concept of respect as a pivotal and essential component of school leadership practice, which is described in these two stories, in her own words:

Respect. *Ain-nak-owe*, "it shows." That's the way it is, when you're respected, you have earned that privilege of people looking up to you, respecting you, listening to you. You're a person of knowledge then when you've earned respect, but respect has to go both ways. When an elementary educator goes into a classroom, that teacher has to respect the students, every one of them. If you show disrespect to one student, then the kids are not going to respect you…They're going to turn against you, but if you go in and accept all of your students as individuals, that are entitled to your respect, then you get it back. It's hard to do, because we come into these school systems, even the educators, with so much garbage. The kids come in with so much garbage, too. Like Narcisse Blood tells in his lessons, "Our children are our greatest assets. They're our gifts that we get from the Creator. That's what we live for is our children. We need to treat them with respect." If you're in the educational system, if they're not getting respect, they're not going to function. So as far as respect is concerned, I think, it's like everything else, it's got to be earned and learned. Even if you start out on the wrong foot, you can always change things around by changing yourself as a person. You've got to realize; you've got

to have respect for yourself; you've got to like yourself in order to like another

human being…As far as respect is concerned, I think, it's like everything else, like

behaviors, it's got to be earned and learned. If you're in the educational system, if

they're not getting respect, they're not going to function. Even if you start out on

the wrong foot, you can always change things around by changing yourself as a

person. You've got to have respect for yourself. You've got to like yourself in

order to like another human being. Traditionally, we were taught to respect our

elders, our parents.

*Noonaki* relates the *Piikani* concept of respect as a formative process, beginning

at the earliest days of an individual's life and carrying on into their adulthood. *Piikani*

cultural constructs demand the use of respect in building and understanding relationships,

as well as the individual's ability to navigate the community as recognized for their

adherence to being respectful. *Noonaki* reflects on a disintegration of respect that she

witnessed as a school leader:

In order to put up with these little kids, tolerate their differences, lifestyles, and

the garbage they bring into the classrooms. All of this is not an easy task and this

needs to start at home. Traditionally, we were taught to respect our elders and our

parents. We didn't talk back or question anything. Our parents said something, we

respected their decisions because they were people of knowledge. Our

grandparents are the historians of our culture. They know the past and were so

much smarter than us. We were taught to sit down and listen; you didn't interfere

when they were talking. We were taught all the traits of being respectful. Today

we don't have these same teachings. I hear kids cursing their parents and

grandparents. My parents and my grandparents must be turning over in their grave

when they hear and see these things going on. It was never acceptable in my

lifestyle because we had great respect for our parents and our grandparents. And I

hear it in the community. I hear it in the school system. I hear inappropriate words

that are being accepted as our daily language. When there was an adult

conversation, we didn't interfere. We weren't allowed in the same room as adults

when they were visiting and talking, we were asked to step out and we were

respectful, we obeyed. We were obedient.

## Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholders are the basis from which school leaders derive their influence and

engaging them in the education of their students has been shown to improve school-

community relations. *Noonaki* urges that school leaders are wise to listen, involve, and

foster strong relations with all stakeholders, especially as they seek to promote the

development of their school's primary stakeholders, the students. *Noonaki* relates

engaging stakeholders by focusing on each individually, where her stories reflect her

perceptions and experiences with each as a school leader.

### Students

Students are the center of education, therefore school leaders and all other

stakeholders should dedicate themselves to supporting and accepting the challenge of

educating them. The *Piikani* community is cognizant of the impact students have on the

future of the community at large, honoring them and accepting their presence in our

schools as educators is critical. *Noonaki* recognizes that school leaders create, along with

teachers and staff members, a climate where students feel like assets to the community.

Parents expect from schools that their children are accepted, loved, and supported,

although in some cases this may not be the reality in their own homes. School leaders

need to expect from all stakeholders, that they commit themselves to support educational

goals of the school in its mission to prepare students for their lifetime. Students on the

Blackfeet Indian Reservation, according to *Noonaki*, face insurmountable personal

challenges, and in some cases, communities have seen a continuous onslaught of

premature death, from murder, suicide, automobile accidents, and other causes. To show

respect to children is to be dedicated to their development and support them in ways that

increase the likelihood of their success. *Noonaki* expands upon this in a story:

> Accept all of your students as individuals that are entitled to your respect, then
>
> you get it back. And it's hard to do, because we come into these school systems,
>
> even the educators, with so much garbage. Narcisse Blood tells in his lessons that
>
> our children are our greatest assets. Our children are very, very special gifts that
>
> we get from the Creator. That's what we live for is our children. We need to treat
>
> them with respect. It's so important to love and cherish these children, like
>
> Narcisse Blood and Ryan [Heavy Head] told their audience. You can just feel the
>
> love that parents have for their children, because they're so precious to them.  And
>
> traditionally, that's the way it was in our culture. Somewhere in our
>
> transformation from one culture to another, we started losing that sense that

children are a gift and we started taking our children for granted. When you lose

a child, it makes you realize how short life is and how unpredictable it is. You

never know. My dedication to children stems from that, from losing a child,

because it was so hard on us when we lost one of our grandsons, so it's a difficult

thing to go through. A lot of people that don't have that experience in their

lifetime, don't see why we say children are a treasure. When something like that is

taken away from you so sudden and unpredicted it has a devastating effect on

your whole family and it takes a long time to recover.

Students on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation are often positioned to speak their

truth when encountered or prompted by situations, either in the school or the community,

according to *Noonaki*. Students often assume roles within their family, where their

parents or other guardians either have abandoned or have little time to attend to family

matters; therefore, this falls on older students to be a support system for younger students

in their household. *Noonaki* recognized that students have experiences that many people

do not encounter until their adult years; therefore, they are wise beyond their years and

are well aware of factors that impact their success in school. School leaders, teachers,

staff, parents, and community members need to listen to student voices, value their

viewpoints, and allow them to contribute to the conscience of the school, which *Noonaki,*

describes this in a story:

Giving a child the opportunity to voice their opinion on an issue was something

that was, I found to be a positive way of dealing with the problems in school. I

had some students that got into trouble and I knew the one boy's parents very well

so, when he came into the office, as I was the disciplinarian, as the assistant principal. He came into the office, I sat him down, and we discussed the issue. "Well, what happened? What led up to this incident?" He told me and was very honest with me. I appreciated that and told him I appreciated his honesty, but I asked him, "How do you think we should deal with this?" He told me what he thought his consequence should be and I asked him, "Do you want to deal with it yourself or would you like me to call your parents and have your parents be a part of the decision of what consequence you should have for your action?" He said, "I want to deal with it. I don't want my mother and my dad involved in it." I said, "Okay. Fine." So, he dealt with it. That was in the middle school. He was in the seventh grade and was very, very mature about dealing with the mischief that he got into. Children are smarter than what we give them credit for. They figure things out early in life and they plan their little games. We need to listen to these students. We need to listen and hear them. Hear what they have to say. And oftentimes, in our educational system, we don't allow that. Our students aren't allowed to voice their opinions. They're told to do as they're told and not to question things. The ability to speak up as I've noticed in my little grandchildren and my children is that they are very vocal. They'll stand right up to me and argue with me until they think their idea or complaint is heard. Oftentimes, these kids don't get that opportunity.

The Blackfeet Indian Reservation is subject to an internal struggle where students need to navigate the fulfillment of individual and collective needs. *Noonaki* relates how

colonial efforts of assimilation have emphasized the individual in student development, whereas the *Piikani* see the individual and their development as complementary to the needs of the community. School leaders, teachers, and staff members recognize students as individuals; however, they need to possess a firm understanding of the community dynamics desired. Collective responses can provide the *Piikani* community with capable future generations through a conscience effort to ensure equity in education. Individualism is also a factor, in which school leaders need to identify among teachers and staff members key individuals to assist in optimizing their contributions toward the school, as *Noonaki* describes this in a story:

> When you have, maybe five or six hundred students in the building and you're given the responsibility of providing education to them, the main thing is that each of these students are individuals, and that individualism is kind of forgotten and overlooked, as well as overlooked among each of the staff people especially the administrators, your cooks, and custodians.

School leaders, teachers, and staff members are being watched by students every day. Through their interactions, treatment, and support for one another, all adults within the school contribute to the system as a matter of mutual respect. *Noonaki* relates these behaviors as residual when they encounter students that learn these behaviors from teachers and staff members; therefore, tactics and responses used by the school leaders, teachers, and staff members themselves, can be perceived in ways that they may not have intended to model for the students. *Noonaki* stresses that school leaders expect teachers and staff members to recognize their own behaviors as potential triggers for students who

may not feel comfortable in the school environment or know how to respond to its

pressures. *Noonaki* relates this in two stories:

> They get known, that they're overbearing and pushy and demanding and that just
>
> does not work in a school system. These behaviors carry over into the classroom
>
> when they lack respect for the children. I think that's why we have a lot of
>
> dropouts because these kids do not feel comfortable, they do not feel respected.
>
> So, in respect you have to be sure that you're sincere, you can't fake respect. I
>
> have people come up and say "Oh, how are you? You look so good. You look so
>
> fine." Then turn around and mumble something about I did something wrong or
>
> this or that. You have to be genuine to earn respect.

School leaders influence students and set the tone for the entire school through

their interactions and demeanor with them. *Noonaki* expressed that positivity on the part

of the school leader can be recognizably contagious among all stakeholders, thus forming

the basis for the promotion of a safe, orderly, and supportive school environment, which

*Noonaki* describes in this story:

> I loved the Babb Elementary School! I loved the kids! When I came in here, a lot
>
> of times they'd be in line, getting ready to come in and eat one of the two meals
>
> that were served. As soon as they spotted me, they were always so happy. "*Ok*i,
>
> [name omitted], [name omitted], how are you? Hello, [name omitted]." They were
>
> just pleasant to be around. It was a happy place. It was never a place where the
>
> students and staff were unhappy. When we're not able to accomplish those little

things, but just being a school and having that sense of pride makes a big

difference.

*Noonaki* relates that student behaviors are often a response to their environment

and a variety of other social factors that impact them in ways that limit their performance

in school. School leaders, teachers, and staff members have to create for students an

environment where respect is operationalized and promoted by way of interactions.

*Noonaki* emphasizes that students come from a variety of home situations, both good and

bad; therefore, it is important to make the school a place where they do not encounter

stimuli to which they will respond negatively, as *Noonaki* describes in these two stories:

Respect, they don't have that. They're screaming and yelling and running around,

crying and you know, fighting and stuff like that. I see a lot of disrespect amongst

older students. So, when you teach the kids respect at a younger age, our

educational system seems to flow much smoother. I was at the Babb Elementary

School; we had a wonderful group of kids! There were no real discipline

problems, except for minor infractions. The little girls liked to have

disagreements. We didn't allow bullying because it was a small enough school

where we were able to control it, if there was any bullying. Occasionally, we had

incidents where somebody was upset. But they were easily resolved because of

the small number of students here and the small number of staff. The families

were very, very dedicated to their children out here, in the smaller rural school.

We worked with them and some of them came from dysfunctional families, too.

There were two brothers and they had a sister. Just from dealing with those kids, I

could tell a lot of it was their frustration that they brought in from home. Their anger. They were angry at their parents and so they brought their emotions here to school and usually problems with their emotions created an unbalance in their life. Babb is a poor community. It was not a rich community. Some of the homes, in the past, were dirt floors. But they had the strong family unit. Some of them were large families who had respect for their elders and you don't see that very often anymore.

They [students] become part of your family, just like the school staff becomes a part of your family or extended family. They're part of the community! A lot of them are part of your extended families, so, being an educator is not just all about books, textbooks, study, and research. It's daily life! When you live in a community, that's your life! You have to participate. You have to be active. You can't sit at home and expect to be visible. We attended all the sports events our children were involved in and that's one of the good things about the parents in Browning, or on the Blackfeet Reservation, is they support their children 100% in any sports activity. We often wish they could do it for the academic activities. As a leader, you have to be involved. You have to be in attendance. The children especially enjoy you watching them participate in things. The children love to hear positive reinforcement from the principals. When they're successful in anything they do, the biggest rewards are verbal praise, just to be there for them, and supporting them when we have assemblies. We recognize kids that work really hard.

Schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation vary in size and resources. As *Noonaki* relates, location and school size has an impact on student behavior, as well as the opportunities they have access to. The more students, the more complex school leadership becomes. Therefore, *Noonaki* asserts that the school leader must position themselves to draw from realistic and practical applications for involving the community, especially in ways that reach and help most of the students.

<u>Teachers</u>

Supporting teachers is the foundation of the school leader-teacher relationship. School leaders depend on teachers (and staff members) to lead school improvement efforts, as their positions will be the most impacted from changes according to *Noonaki*. School leaders need to be cognizant of the teacher's capacity to overcome and implement improvements in their classrooms, both through classroom instruction and management of students. *Noonaki* credits building strong relationships with teachers and staff members as the key to her successes, as expectations provide for professional growth, guided by her ability to work well with her teachers:

> I got along real good with the teachers because I felt like I had a lot of respect for them. I didn't tower or stand over them and watch them do their lesson plans and correct them on the spot. I would come in quietly into the classroom and sit someplace away where the students didn't notice me and I didn't interfere with their teaching. You don't humiliate them or degrade them. You wait till the students were not around or other staff members. I guess that was the biggest problem with some administrators, was you know, coming around, looking over

the teacher's' shoulders and constantly nitpicking, I called it. We all had ways of

doing our work differently. Some were a little bit slower, some were a little bit

faster and you just had to let them do their job. I didn't want to be standing over

their shoulders watching and making them nervous and feeling inadequate while

they were teaching. I think that was the most important thing that I acquired was

the sense to not do that. These teachers were human, too! They had their

weaknesses. They have their problems. If there was a problem, if they were

struggling, then you worked with them individually. And not as a group.

*Noonaki* believes that school leaders, who give teachers (and instructional staff)

the space to do their work, know how to help them when needed. School leaders need to

be conveyers of constructive feedback that is aligned to the accomplishment of

improvement goals that, as *Noonaki* tells it, give teachers the confidence to improve and

share with others successful strategies for the classroom:

I had a young administrator ask me for advice because she was going to Alaska to

a small school. My advice to her was "Let the teachers teach… Don't be

interfering in their teaching." You have the right to go in and observe a teacher

and make recommendations for what they need improvement on. Then you

casually meet with them after school away from the classroom, away from the

students, and away from other staff members and go into a conference with them.

Give them the respect of confidentiality. To have somebody stand over you,

peaking and watching what you're doing, in my estimation, is not being a good

administrator. You can go in and do your classroom observations, make your

notes, go back and write up your report, and then have a conference with the

teacher. That was my advice. But, sometimes people don't listen. They take it with

a grain of salt. If they want to listen, fine. My advice was to just let the teachers

teach! They're all different because we are all different! And the more interference

you have in teaching, the unhappier the staff seemed to be.

Being respected by teachers (and staff members) means that the school leader

continues to engage them in intentional, yet assertive ways, to rally them to assist in

forming school-based solutions when, as *Noonaki* related, faced with an immediate or

difficult decision, as she describes in this story:

People needed to be respected! You don't just mouth the words confidentiality

and respect. You need to show it! You need to be the leader and people respect

you for that. But on the other hand, too, you cannot let people run over you, walk

over you. You had to be sure of your stand in any issue that you came upon and

sometimes it could be an unpopular decision. But as a leader, if this is what you

see as a way out of the problem, you had to be the leading force in making

changes.

School leaders should acknowledge, as *Noonaki* emphasizes, when demands on

teachers and the sacrifices they make create challenges for them both professionally and

personally. This being said, teachers have to be open with school leaders when pressures

impact their ability to meet the needs of their students. *Noonaki* encourages school

leaders to listen to teachers when they have challenges, lead them to the resources

available, rally additional help, and train teachers to fulfill demanded expectations:

Teachers were overwhelmed with all of the responsibilities, all of the research,

and all of the assessments they had to do. The things that were piled on them from

the administration, like No Child Left Behind with adequate yearly progress

demands, these teachers were just exhausted. Oftentimes, they had to take their

work home. Do their planning at home because there was so much other stuff that

needed to do that was being demanded by administration and our government. A

person has to have respect for these people, for the profession and for the time

that they have dedicated - their lives - to educating students. And with No Child

Left Behind, we were leaving children behind.

Staff Members

Staff members contribute greatly to the school and its operations; most things they

do are not even recognized as they represent the standard norms not usually considered,

even by school leaders. *Noonaki* emphasizes that staff member's duties may be different

from school leaders and teachers; however, they all share the same collective

responsibilities that support students in the school. *Noonaki* conveys this in a story:

In the Babb Elementary School, the work that the custodians did was respected.

The school always looked clean and the restrooms were always clean. Everything

just looked like it was brand new because the custodian cared.  The custodian

cared about the kids.  The custodian had much pride in her work. When there was

anything that was wasn't supposed to be going on, they took the initiative and put

a stop to it, reminding the students and sometimes community members that this

was their school. This was where they had to have a sense of pride. And it was

everybody's responsibility to maintain the building, because access to the

maintenance services wasn't always that convenient, especially in the wintertime.

So, we, the people here had to know what to do. I can remember one year the

kitchen flooded and it was the custodian's job and the cook and everyone else to

pitch in and get the water cleaned up before it did too much damage and just that

quick - it was replaced and fixed.

School leaders and teachers working with staff members need to know that their

duties are important to helping meet school-wide expectations. *Noonaki* credits her staff

members as instrumental in assisting and preparing the students, parents, and the

community for changes within the school, as most of them tend to be from the

community itself. *Noonaki* demanded that staff members are not to be seen or treated as

peons or subservient to anyone within the school; rather, they should be seen as

colleagues to school leaders and teachers they work with. School leaders as supervisors

need to support staff member needs and assist them in rising to the occasion, as *Noonaki*

emphasizes in this story:

Everybody needs to be treated with respect. Everybody knew what their positions

were. If you found somebody that didn't know what they were doing, you gently

assist them.

Schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation are not immune to external mandates

related to student performance and/or trends that reflect the changing realities of school

improvement. School leaders, like *Noonaki*, are called upon to build awareness for

themselves in encouraging teachers, staff members, and other stakeholders to contribute

to changes identified to be implemented in the schools. Preparing teachers and staff

members for changes means recognizing the impact of their current duties and

responsibilities, as a means of developing the appropriate reasoning, and including them

in finding solutions that are best suited to support student needs. *Noonaki* discusses

change in this story:

> So, that was a change, you know, and these changes come real slow. Changes are
>
> not successful if they are immediately imposed upon people. It has to come about
>
> real slowly and with careful thought and consideration of the environment of the
>
> people that are going to do have to do the change, the people that have to live with
>
> the change. These are things that we encounter and you know the best people, I
>
> found, were the cooks and the custodians.  They were faithful and if you respected
>
> them, they respected you, too.  Because a lot of the time, we had to call on them
>
> for help.

Mutual respect among school leaders, teachers, and staff members is essential, as

*Noonaki* articulates; it contributes greatly to the school and its functionality. Staff

members need to feel like they are appreciated and that what they bring to the table is

valued. *Noonaki* indicates that school leaders often have to depend on staff members

when teachers are unavailable; therefore, they have to respect the capacities of staff

members to support them in times of need, as *Noonaki* explains in this story:

> That's one of the things that I learned first and foremost, is that, if you respect
>
> them, you're going to be okay.  If you treat them bad, your years as an

administrator are not going to be successful.  It's going to be really trying.  If

we're not respected by your staff, it's a tough go!

<u>Parents and Community</u>

Parental and community influence is needed when school leaders devise efforts to

integrate culture and language into the curriculum and school operations. *Noonaki*

recognizes school leaders as being instrumental in providing teachers and staff members

with the community-based leverage to bring in resources from the community. *Noonaki*

intentionally used stakeholders to move culture and language components beyond

supplemental information to total integration within the curriculum delivered to the

students, and describes this in two stories:

> Our first teachers were the parents. Today, parents don't have time for their kids.
> The parents need to be more involved.

> Parent involvement, it was important and community involvement, especially
> when we started infusing or integrating the Native American culture and the
> language. We wanted the parents to be involved and to learn too, because many of
> the parents were not aware of their heritage, their culture, or their language. This
> is where Narcisse Blood would always come in and say, "Everything is related.
> We have to be connected. But if one person is left out, they're not connected." As
> *Piikani*, we learn to respect everybody and everything. We respect animals. We
> respect forests. We respect our trees. They bring life to us. Everything that brings
> life to us, we learn to respect and not abuse it. We have a lot of abuse in many
> different forms because some people haven't learned to respect. We haven't

learned to respect life, as life is complicated, it's not an easy thing. We have

struggled for years to teach the *Piikani* language in the school system as well as

the culture. And it's been really slow and a struggle. And a lot of it, too, is because

the parents are not involved. The parents are not involved in the learning, so they

have to be a part of it and continue it.

School leaders cannot operate effectively without being recognized (by

stakeholders) for their sincere interest and obligation to the community, according to

*Noonaki;* therefore, decisions and day-to-day operations of her school prompted her as

the school leader to build keen awareness of community factors that can cause conflict or

isolate the school from their stakeholders. *Noonaki* emphasizes this relationship in a

story:

If you are not connected with the community, with the people, with the families,

with your culture, with your language, you're going to struggle and you're going

to fail miserably.

School leaders need to understand the dynamics of families and the challenges to

their involvement of their students' education. *Noonaki* used parental involvement as a

supportive function of the school to the extent that it enabled parents to have a role in

supporting the school; however, as families become more involved, *Noonaki* warns that

school leaders will encounter a diversity of factors that contribute to how (or which)

students' parents (and guardians) are involved and the level in which they participate:

The Browning Middle School had a lot of good parents involved. We had

community members come in as committee members on different things that we

had going on. The bilingual program was one as we had funding to support parent involvement. Parental trainings were also something that kept them quite active and functional in the school. In some of the trainings, it was mostly the mothers that attended. The fathers and other men didn't seem to have the interest to be trained as far as their children are concerned; it's the mother's responsibility to raise their kids. A man's responsibility is to make sure that there is a roof over their heads, food on the table, and they're warm. That's what my husband says anyway. I just got the idea that that's basically what all men thought! But we had some men that were sincerely and earnestly interested in the education of their children, they participated in these school meetings as community members and parents. Being very active with the parent and community involvement helped us a lot because the parents knew what was going on and there wasn't so much finger-pointing and accusations of wrong doings toward the school. When the parents are involved, then they know what their kids are learning. That was a task that we had to do. Our goal is to get the community and the parents involved.

School leaders need to identify and work to eliminate barriers to parental and community involvement that exist within the structure of their school. Creating a more open system toward the community required *Noonaki* to make accommodations and meaningfully involve parents in planning and development, in order to reflect community expectations of school and extra-curricular functions, as *Noonaki* describes in a story:

As far as leadership is concerned. To get people involved in the school activities, they have to be comfortable. They have to have that sense of place, that they

belong in this community, that they belong in the school system, and that they feel

welcome here. Community members, parents are not comfortable being in public

or coming into a school or volunteering, as even an assistant in the classroom.

And, oftentimes, in a small community like Babb or the Hutterite colonies, people

can be clannish and they have the darndest reasons for not wanting to come into

the school saying things like, "…oh, I don't like that one or so and so is going to

be there." You have to kind of overlook those negative influences and try to do

the best you can to get them to join the school activities. Babb Elementary School

had a spring picnic every year and there was always a good turnout. The school

supplied the hamburgers and hotdogs and all the other side dishes the parents

brought. It's an amazing way to get everyone together, the whole community

showed up. You're a family, as staff, as children, you become one big family.

Parental involvement, no matter how challenging to implement, has been shown

to help schools meet student needs. *Noonaki* said that without it parental involvement,

school leaders many find that it is potentially more difficult to recognize factors that will

make it easier to reach students, through their parents:

When the parents are involved like that, and they are assisting, the children are a

lot happier. When we don't have parent involvement, children are resentful.

Actually, they're very, very sad little people.

High levels of involvement by parents position them as cultural influences over

these schools; therefore, school leaders have to be willing to accept community nuances.

The Blackfeet Indian Reservation is home to five Hutterite communities, two of which

were places *Noonaki* oversaw as rural school principal and are part of the Browning

School District. Hutterite communities operate much like the *Piikani* did prior to the

formation of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, as a form of communal living with a strict

adherence to Christian-cultural values and practices. Hutterite communities educate their

students until the eighth grade in order to prepare their students solely to support the

economic prosperity of the community. Hutterite student contributions to their

community focus on their strengths and abilities, in identifying their role as a contributing

member. Hutterite communities also identify certain roles that are gender specific and

appropriate to their distinct Christian-cultural values and beliefs. Through the eyes of our

neighbors, *Noonaki* recognizes that school leaders of the rural schools have a glimpse

into how community and parental involvement can optimize cultural expectations for the

schools, which *Noonaki* describes in this story:

> In the Hutterite colonies the parents took care of the discipline and we didn't have
>
> to administer discipline at the colonies as the principal. The discipline that we
>
> dealt with was very, very minor in those schools. No major incidents at all and it
>
> showed when I entered the building. When I walked into the building, the
>
> students were happy and they were happy to see me.

Parents, family members, and the community will protect their children from

harm and students will learn from them when responding to life situations. *Noonaki*

acknowledges that at times of conflict, parents will even stand up for students when they

are in the wrong; therefore, *Noonaki* recognizes that this can pose difficulties for a school

leader to administer consequences and set expectations; as she remembers certain

students that, due to lack of support from the parents and extended family members did

not support school policies. *Noonaki* explains the connection between respect and

community, in these two stories:

> Just like Maslow saw in his observations, these children were protected. They
>
> were precious gifts to them. And they imitated their parents in a lot of the skills
>
> that they learned, the survival techniques.
>
> A lot of times people don't want to go [to ceremony] because of the unruly kids,
>
> the noise, in our tradition, our families love their kids unconditionally. It stemmed
>
> back from years ago, the parents were busy, the mothers, and the grandparents
>
> and the aunts and the uncles were the disciplinarians. Then the parents loved their
>
> kids unconditionally. So, somehow, I think that got out of hand, because
>
> nowadays, some of our kids are really hard to control, little ones especially.

## Culturally-Responsive Schooling (CRS)

Culturally-responsive schooling means that schools use the culture and language

of an Indigenous community to provide community-specific responses that inform

curriculum, school functions, and convey the educational goals of the community. School

leaders, teachers, and staff members must rely on students, parents, and community

members, according to *Noonaki*, to provide information, potential training opportunities,

and input into decisions that will impact the formation of practices that reflect the

community culture and language.

*Noonaki* urges school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation to make assurances that his or her school is a haven for students to express themselves, form connections to their culture, and grow academically in a culturally-responsive school environment, which she describes in these two stories:

> Maslow found that out when he was on the *Siksika* Reserve. They didn't have many discipline problems with the children because of a more relaxed atmosphere. There was no stress or pressure. The kids knew what was expected of them and they were obedient.

> I had to be at the same level as the students, I had to treat them with respect in order for them to respect me. When you get into high school, you have to have respect for these kids as young adults. They're going into adulthood. We're preparing them to step out into this world. You have to be able to be a good listener. You have to be able to understand where they're coming from. Because by the time they get into high school they pretty much have their own minds and their own ways of learning and sometimes they have an idea of what they want in this life. We can't just force them into a different situation, "Oh, you'd be good at this, you'll be good at that!" You have to cultivate what their interests are and where their abilities are so they become contributing members of our community.

*Noonaki* depicts the *Piikani* family as unlike the typical American nuclear household. On the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, aside from the presence of nuclear family dynamics, is the extended family; as *Noonaki* recognizes this, she also recognized that even adoptive family units can have an impact on student relationships with the

school. Student discipline should be seen by the school leader, on a case-by-case basis, especially when the school expects the family to assist in correcting a student's behavior or demeanor. *Noonaki* recommends that school leaders characterize families as potentially diverse, and that parents are not the only family members that are invested in the education of students with whom they are in relation to. The emphasis of extended family relationships is a residual component of the cultural construct that determines what "family" consists of and how students are supported through it. These relationships are detailed by *Noonaki* in a story:

> We as *Piikani* didn't shame our people. We weren't used to being put down by our parents. Our parents gave us unconditional love as we were growing up. The discipline was in the hands of our aunts and uncles. They were our disciplinarians. Our mothers were busy! They were hard-working people and they didn't discipline us, totally different from some European style of raising children and administering discipline.

School leaders set the tone for the overall culture of the school: *Noonaki* also emphasizes the positive impacts of others who contribute to it. *Noonaki* believes that school leaders have to establish the school as the center of the community, thus ensuring that it is an open, welcoming, and dynamic environment that is accepting of community functions. *Noonaki* recognizes this influence of the community, as part of the school's purpose to support student learning:

> I thoroughly enjoyed my five years or six years out here [Babb Elementary School] because of the ability to get along with the staff. The little school here,

has a strong sense of pride in their building. It still looks like its brand new!  They

have always respected this building and still do. In the Babb community, you go

outside and it's clean out here.  You don't see any trash or anything laying around

because the community thinks of their school as a community center.

## Self-Determination

The Indigenous experience in the United States has been greatly impacted by

government policies that define eras from contact through more recent efforts to support

tribal self-determination. Coined the "Self-Determination and Education Act," the Nixon

(as in President Richard Nixon) Administration attempted to discard government policies

that were intended to terminate and unravel treaty obligations the United States entered

into with tribes. *Noonaki* embodied self-determination in her role as a school leader, as

she felt it is the right of tribes to uphold the treaty obligations the United States has

accepted (including support for education), and that policies continue to support and

strengthen tribal sovereignty over their own government, land, people, and institutions.

Collective efforts by all within the school are the key to schools assisting the Blackfeet

Indian Reservation in achieving the goals of tribal self-determination, especially when

school leaders, teachers, and staff members understand that accomplishing these goals

requires them to leverage education as a critical tool in nation building. *Noonaki* stresses

that the schools have an obligation to the tribe, which requires them to work collectively:

As a team, that provided a lot of guidance, we listened to everybody. Often, I'd

start the meeting with the person on the right and I'd let them voice their opinion

and their thoughts. And there was no argument, no interference and then we allowed a discussion and after the person got through, a small discussion. And then we went to the next person for their ideas and voice on the issue. And then we followed with a small discussion. When everybody got a chance to voice their opinion and thoughts, then a big discussion followed and a decision was made based on our thoughts and our knowledge. I found it to be really successful, rather than dictating and saying "You're going to do this!" Oftentimes that doesn't work. All of our solutions are not alike.

Indian Education for All began in the late 1970's with the "Indian Studies Bill"; however, the Montana Legislature did not fund such efforts until the early 2000's. In that time, substantial efforts have been underway around the state to ensure that all Montanans learn about the 12 tribal nations in public education and that under supported Native students get the attention they need to close the achievement gap. *Noonaki* demands that school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation support the inclusion of tribal histories, knowledge, and stories into the curricular expectations of their teachers and staff members; therefore, it is important that school leaders are a supportive factor in furthering efforts of self-determination and cultural revitalization within the school. *Noonaki* acknowledges the challenge of this expectation in a story:

At the time we started the bilingual programs, the state of Montana, there was many schools didn't even know there was seven reservations. Couldn't even name the seven reservations in the state of Montana. They all thought we were just Indians. No, we're all different. We all speak a different language. We have our

own way of living and styles and stuff and we learn from each other. But that's not to say one culture is better than the other. They're all important. They're all equal. So, with all of the material and the books that we purchased for this school district, I hope and I believe that they're using them in the schools.

Culturally responsive schooling cannot occur unless all stakeholders are involved and support it. Initiatives to integrate culture and language especially require that everyone has the ability, space, and input to enact concepts like Montana's Indian Education for All into schools where the majority of students are *Piikani*. Stakeholders can assist school leaders in promoting and integrating culture and language into the curriculum, operations, and goals of their school. *Noonaki* recalls this in two stories:

Language and culture in the schools is a cooperative effort. Everybody has to be involved in it and I've watched the language come and go in the school systems. Right now, we're doing a wonderful job of teaching the language, but it's still separated in the core curriculum. We have certified teachers through the state office licensed to teach our language. We have teachers in every school that speak the language and are fluent, yet our students still struggle to use it as our main communication method because our parents and our community don't speak the language. Students are just proud of their accomplishments in the culture, but the parents don't know what they're saying. That's been a big failure on our part as educators: that we didn't get the parents and the community involved in our efforts to endorse Indian Education for All.

When I was the bilingual director, I had this room here full of textbooks. I gathered them, through different places, like the Glenbow Museum, with books all about our people. I went to different reservations and we critiqued books that were written about Native Americans. We were the ones who decided what was authentic information and what wasn't. We had one lady from England that wrote stories on Native Americans and the only thing she had that was Native American was a Navajo rug that was in her home. And yet, she wrote stories about Native Americans. So, one of our tasks was to critique these books. We spent hours and days on different reservations, going through this material that we wanted to expose to our children, teachers, staff, and our families. I had built an extensive library and this all went to the different school systems at different reading levels. We did extensive work on the curriculum here. We sat here and each week we gathered together as a team and worked on the curriculum.  All the subjects that were involved in our studies. I had that feeling, "[*Noonaki*], that's an accomplishment! Maybe not here, but that's how you helped and promoted to revive your culture and your language, for these people to better their lifestyles and to improve their home situations. It goes on, on holidays, the little kids have their little concerts and the Native American traditions and dancing and songs are introduced. We have our language teachers, who are certified through the State of Montana. I was involved in that, in making that a reality. Now, we have Native American language teachers in every school building.

*Noonaki* practiced school leadership in ways that fostered relationships and provided the community with substantial leverage in being included in decisions that occur at the school, especially those that impact students and families. *Noonaki* stresses this as a way to promote community involvement and awareness of the school. Good parent-teacher relations, according to *Noonaki*, strengthen school bonds with the community, which allows teachers to feel less isolated from the community and its needs:

It's such an enormous responsibility to be an educational leader and anybody that steps into that field, I have to admire and I believe they need all the support they can get from the staff and the community, as well as from the outside community…In order for us to work effectively with the students, the parents, and the community we had community members in each building by having parent-teacher committees for community involvement. The Bilingual Program had a parent-teacher organization. Special Education had parent-teacher organization. We kept the parents well informed because we didn't want to have any surprises, and especially unpleasant surprises for the parents. So it was so vital that we get them involved to make them aware of what's going on and what's being offered in the school systems. The parents felt really appreciated and they felt like they were a part of the school system. They're a community!

*Noonaki* asserts that a substantial amount of curriculum implemented by the schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, especially in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics, is not directly created by the teachers and/or staff members themselves normally. Therefore, she encouraged teachers to find new and innovative ways to teach

with considerations for *Piikani* learning styles, special accommodations, and supplemental skill development for post-secondary student options. By focusing on constant improvement, the schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation have been preoccupied with achievement. However, the use of *Piikani* values, culture, and language should be reflected in these efforts, although it is likely that these values are not recognized or adhered to at all levels of the organization or the community. *Noonaki* says, "They [school leaders] set the tone for the school's expectations and values;" therefore, the behavior of others within the school is reflected in the attitudes of its students, teachers, and staff members, as *Noonaki* describes in these two stories:

> In our school systems now, no, we don't do that. We all got these books, we got to do this, we got to follow this curriculum right to the T, you know. It stresses our teachers out. A lot of our students are left behind. I just don't agree with the educational system as it is nowadays. I don't think it teaches respect and it's something that I think we're losing! Especially when we have people in power that aren't respectful of other people or even of themselves. If they don't even like themselves, how can they respect people?

*Noonaki* demonstrates the utility of *Ainnakowe* or "it shows," as it is essential to a school maintaining stakeholder confidence in their students' school, through respect. In the context of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, all stakeholders should be met with respect, by the teachers, staff members, and most importantly, by their school leaders. With the changing demographics of more *Piikani* school leaders, Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS) will emerge, as school leadership practices are examined for their

relevant effectiveness in school systems on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. It is

incumbent upon school leaders to not be insular leadership presences; rather, as *Noonaki*,

describes, they should also act with "respect" in supporting community (tribal) self-

determination. Respect and relationships are at the core of generosity in the *Piikani*

concept of *Aahsitapiitsin*, meaning "sharing," as school leaders will need to show it in

their allocation of school resources and establish how his or her stakeholders and the

community can also contribute to their school's functionality within the context of

educating *Piikani* students.

CHAPTER SEVEN: *AAH-SITA-PIIT-SIN*

[GENEROSITY] OR "SHARING"

*Noonaki's* next stories place special emphasis on challenges and possibilities of exercising the *Piikani* concept of generosity as a school leader, which she describes in her own words as:

> Our people are basically really generous. *Aahsitapiitsin.* That's "you're generous" or "sharing." You give things away!    Our people were never materialistic because they moved. They had to move from camp to camp, very lightly. Oftentimes, and even now, you go visit a family, they'll give you something. They never hoarded things; our people are very generous.
>
> My husband is one of the generous people on the Blackfeet Reservation. I think we'd be millionaires if he'd quit giving away his money. I get so frustrated sometimes, you know! I think he was able to do it because I worked all the time. But anytime anybody's in need, they come to him for financial support and he's there! He gives it to them! You know they're getting their lesson at home on generosity because my husband and I live it!

### Collective Commitments

The recognition that being a school leader on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation is unique and unlike any other community is critical. *Noonaki* extends this notion to the various types of schools that exist and educate *Piikani* students. The *Piikani* have, to a

degree, school choice, although this is dependent on grade level offerings, according to *Noonaki*, who says "most students matriculate into the local area middle schools and/or high school as they progress through secondary education." The school leader needs to form a coalition of resources and committed individuals, who are, as *Noonaki* describes, "generous with their time and aware of community dynamics that position schools to practice flexibility" when engaging the community.

Addressing individual student needs becomes less possible the larger the school is and as *Noonaki* stressed, "Students progress through the system not being fully prepared." At times there are only one or a few teachers or staff members that are called upon to resolve multiple requests or incidents within a day. The school leader, in *Noonaki's* words, is "no exception," to being sensitive to student needs; therefore, the duty of educating students does not fall onto one person. The collective responsibility to help when called upon has to lie with school leaders, teachers, staff members, parents, and the community members. *Noonaki* describes this through her analysis of Maslow:

> In other communities, there's such a need for individualism focused on individual accomplishment or individual success. As Maslow witnessed on the *Siksika* Reserve, it was the family, clan, or groups of people that worked together and assisted each other. When they saw somebody in need, they were there to help each other without the need to be paid, recognized, or rewarded for their task. Everyone succeeded because the community made it so!

Cultural maintenance through community events is seen as a gesture to the collective recognition of its positive impact on the school by hosting the community

whenever possible; as *Noonaki* stresses the importance of giving and sharing as a school leader. Generosity, however, is mutual, and if there is an imbalance or a lack of recognizing the responsibility to give, it is likely that relationships and bonds can be shaken. *Noonaki* asserts that when students are promised rewards in exchange for their academic and/or behavioral compliance, follow-through on the part of teachers, staff members, and parents is critical to maintaining progress and compliance, as *Noonaki* relates in these two stories:

> Maslow wrote in his book about being on that *Siksika* Reserve and the richest person was the one that gave material things away. The materialistic person that had all the horses and didn't give any of them away - they didn't consider him rich and didn't have respect for him. I just remember that, as a child, our families help if a person's in need. They'll give whatever they can! We've lost that tradition. That's a tradition that's being lost amongst our young people and we have a lot of kids that steal, just so they can have what other kids have. It's a shame because they get punished for stealing. What we need to do is make sure that we articulate the value of sharing. We always help each other. When we see people needing something, we'll give them what they need!

> This set of parents came in to work with us, and said this kid needed motivation. In school, he was disruptive for a number of reasons and what we needed was do we come up with a plan. I asked him, "What would you like? What you would you like to work towards as a reward for completing your assignments, for bringing your grades up?" He wanted a saddle, because they lived on a ranch and

they had horses. This guy was in the eighth grade here [Browning Middle

School]. The parents said, "Okay, you get your grades up, you do your

assignments, and we have no referrals till Christmas. You'll get your saddle at

Christmas!" So, low and behold, he worked hard and did what he was expected to

do and he made an honest effort to complete his assignments and to bring his

grades up and stopped his disruptive behavior. He had a hard time controlling his

impulses at times, but he made an honest effort. After Christmas, his behaviors

were back! The lack of work and motivation was gone. So, we checked into it,

"Well, what happened?  Did you get your saddle?" Nope, the parents didn't follow

through. They didn't get him his saddle like they promised and that was written in

the plan and they just totally disregarded it. I don't know why.

Generosity is a mindset that allows for relationships to see each other as a means

of collective support, as *Noonaki* emphasizes, especially in a school whose sole purpose

is to give to the community and share educational opportunities with future generations.

*Noonaki* had no tolerance in the school of an individual withholding resources from

students, and it "goes against the *Piikani* traditions of giving or sharing." The inability to

see this as an educator will inhibit their ability to fully commit themselves to the students

and their needs, which *Noonaki* describes as:

Generosity is so important to teach and I think that this would be the number one

thing an educational leader teaches their teachers for school improvement. This

should be the number one priority because we all come from different cultures

and different environments. But a lot of people don't know how to be generous.

They don't know about generosity. I watch my great grandkids. One kid will have a toy and the other one will run up and grab it and take it, then the fight starts. So, they have to learn about sharing. Being able to share something is the beginning of generosity… At the Browning Middle School, I had a teacher from Texas that was teaching. Her culture was totally different from our culture. This kid came in and he didn't have pencils or paper, so he asked a student behind him, "Can I borrow a pencil and a paper?" She [the student being asked] reached in her desk, got the paper and the pencil and gave it to him. The teacher chastised him for being a bum! Saying, "You don't bum in my classroom. You don't do this!" This kid was humiliated! In our culture, if we need something, we ask for it, and we get it usually. You share what you have! The parent came in really on the fight! Ready to rip the teacher apart because of the teacher's nerve in calling her son a bum. We almost lost this value because of our educational and boarding school system teachings. You know, don't steal, don't bum, don't do this, and don't do that!

Generosity means school leaders need to create space for *Piikani* culture and language, allowing for it to not just be a supplement to the school's curriculum, but that it is expressly is able to thrive in the school setting. Efforts to fully integrate *Piikani* culture and language into the curriculum have been hampered by lack of school institutional memory and "time itself "as efforts are rarely sustained past implementation according to *Noonaki*. She has been witness to many efforts that were undertaken to promote the *Piikani* culture and language in the schools of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, which

have continuously fallen short due to consistent turnover of school leaders, teachers, and

staff. This is also evident in the lack of meaningful and sustained integration of the

Blackfeet Education Standards (2005) into school curriculum, operations, and training, as

*Noonaki* describes in this story:

> We worked on an integrated curriculum. We developed an amazing curriculum by
> many different educators, both native and non-native. We worked for hours on
> that curriculum. When I came back to our school system, things were back to the
> way they were! I asked, "Where's the curriculum that we spent so many hours
> developing? What did you do with it? Is it implemented into the curriculum of the
> schools? Nobody had an answer for me."

It is alarmingly evident that the integration of *Piikani* culture and language is not

going to occur when district and school leadership do not support it or understand how it

can be done. This is a formidable challenge, as *Noonaki* continuously stressed that

collective commitments are a requirement for any school undertaking something new, as

she explains in these two stories:

> Indian Education for All, for instance, had been successful because everybody
> bought into it. You have to have the whole school system buy into it. If you don't,
> or if you have a superintendent that doesn't buy into, doesn't believe in it, or
> thinks it's a waste of time it's not going to be successful. If you have staff
> members, teachers that feel the same way, it's not going to be successful.
> I guess sharing our culture and our language with the [Hutterite] colonies was fun
> and interesting. The kids were very, very receptive. But the adults weren't. It was

always kind of a controversy because it was state legislation that we had to

provide Indian Education for all students in the state of Montana, so we had to

bring our culture to them. We learned about their culture while we were out here

working with the students and, I guess, I learned to respect their rights to practice

their lifestyles and their cultures. We were very limited in what we could teach of

our culture and our traditions and our religion, even though the kids were full of

curiosity. You know, they'd ask questions and we'd answer them. But there were

things like the singing and the songs that they wouldn't allow.

School leaders need parents to be an active part of their student's education, and

according to *Noonaki*, parents that give resources, time, and energy to the school (and its

activities) is a show of support for the students. *Noonaki* grew to appreciate parents and

what they brought to the school, as she describes as:

If you have all the parents, that would be my number one wish - that all the

parents would donate their time, effort, and their good will to these students, as a

lot of them don't have that support in our educational system. The generosity of

the people is awesome. We always refer back to giving stuff away as the main

means of generosity. But in these communities here, it's the time the parents

spend out here, the time they spend with their children, and the time they spend

fundraising for events. I see where they just had a fundraising event here to take

the kids skiing in Whitefish. I see that the parents all get really involved. They

bring a lot of stuff from their home. Oftentimes they cannot really afford to spare

this food and stuff they prepare for fundraising events. That's so generous of them

to be involved in their children's educational process.

Generosity, according to *Noonaki*, also requires school leaders to create the space

for cultural experiences to be held in and sponsored by the school. Excluding students

(and even teachers and staff members) from cultural experiences is an injustice,

reminiscent of assimilative tactics that are the root to many social ills on the Blackfeet

Indian Reservation. Students will display behavior issues at any given moment

throughout the school day, however it is not anyone within the school's right to deprive

them of cultural experiences, as *Noonaki* explains in this story:

> One time the Native American Studies instructor at the Vina Chattin School
>
> started an after-school activity and the teachers picked the students that could go.
>
> One student who was part of the group, got up at seven in the morning and made
>
> the effort to get to school to board the bus and he was told he couldn't go because
>
> of his behavior. He was an Attention Deficit Disorder student. The kid went home
>
> crying and as the school administrator, I was upset. I went to the school and I
>
> said, "Ho! Wait a minute now! What happened to the No Child Left Behind and
>
> Indian Education for All? What happened to that? Why was he excluded because
>
> of his behavior?" To this day, the person that did that still could not look me in
>
> the eye. But he didn't have an answer. He just didn't want to deal with that child.

*Noonaki* operated in schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, and as her years

as a school leader progressed, she encountered more challenges with regards to growing

student needs and accommodations. School leaders are tasked with identifying trends in

education; as *Noonaki* suggests, this is a guiding factor in ensuring that teachers and staff have the knowledge, training, and temperament to assist in their learning development. The schools, by investing in training that recognize the signals and interventions associated with student needs, can implement accommodations to increase the likelihood of student success, as *Noonaki* tells in these two stories:

You have kids with autistic needs, when they get on a task, they don't like to quit! They want to finish whatever they're doing. If you try to take them away from what they are doing, to put it away for another day, another time, you encounter a lot of problems. These kids' mind is set on completing the task that was put before them!

A population here at the Vina Chattin School was left behind, the strugglers, the ones that had problems keeping up with the other students and most of them were special needs kids. After that was recognized, we linked it to problems with meeting Adequate Yearly Progress because of No Child Left Behind. According to the regulations and rules, they had enough time allotted to them. But when you have needy students I don't think this was fair to them, which according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a lot of those needs were not met. In Babb, I think a lot of it led to failure. A lot of it led to dropouts. When they got into town, because they were from a small population, it was difficult for them to adjust to a lot of different personalities in bigger schools and not getting the attention they were used to.

Student nutrition has been a long-term focus of schools on the Blackfeet Indian

Reservation as far back as *Noonaki* remembers. The schools qualify for assistance from

the state and federal government as the majority of students qualify for free lunches by

the definition of federal income standards. *Noonaki* maintains that despite the continued

presence of free school lunch programs, poverty is still a huge factor in student's lives

and they are open year-round, even in the summer months. Students struggling with

hunger has been a long-standing issue, and as the community faces high rates of

preventable illness, such as diabetes, the schools remain the one constant nutritional food

source for school-aged students (3-18). *Noonaki* blames rigid school structures and the

preoccupation with time, for created eating behaviors to accommodate schedules rather

than fulfill the nutritional needs of students, teachers, and staff members. *Noonaki*

expands upon this concept in this story:

> The lunches were good out at Babb Elementary School. I ate a lot out here
>
> because they had good meals. The cooks made sure that they provided good,
>
> healthy meals for the kids… The thing that upset me, too, all the time, I had a
>
> hard time dealing with the half hour lunches!  We were shoveling food. We didn't
>
> take the time to enjoy our food because of the schedules. I'd find myself when I
>
> went out in public and went out to a restaurant, that I was shoveling my food as
>
> fast as I could and I wasn't enjoying my food! I often thought, what are we
>
> teaching these kids, if they're not through eating, the trays were grabbed and put
>
> away. Saying, "You were wasting our time. You didn't eat. You need to get back
>
> to the classroom!" I thought this was something that was very destructive that still

goes on in our school system. Not that we need to take a whole hour or two hours to eat, but a little more relaxed and less stressful atmosphere to consume food is so much better for your body and your health.

School leaders have the single greatest impact on the climate of their school. Public education by design has been aligned to mimic and promote expectations of the Industrial Revolution. Concepts of time and flexibility often collide with community norms or concepts of time, as *Noonaki* explains, are due to restrictions and norms imposed by public educational models (and schedules). Therefore, this makes aligning the students' and the community's expectations of time to that of the school's a challenge. *Noonaki* relates understanding this to students' experiencing flexibility. In a sometimes unpredictable community, this enhances their likelihood of success, as *Noonaki* describes in a story:

Maslow made me think of the days when I was young, out there so carefree. There was no stress of a bell ringing and having to be in a classroom and sitting down and having somebody constantly over me and telling me, "This is right! This is not right! This is how you do this!" You learn from watching and doing, that's what we did when we're growing up… I talked about love, being what this world is all about! That's what makes our lives and our world function, as it brings us happiness. We can't love one another when we're not happy. So, if a child's unhappy in an educational system, there is something wrong! We have to really find out, do some research, question the kid, just like we tell them to do! We need to do the same thing.  We need to check, ask questions, and find out why

things are not working. Oftentimes we don't take the time to find out what's going

on…We demand so much of our young people this day and age, with tremendous

problems getting our kids to school. They miss a lot of school because they're not

interested in what's being taught! They're not happy there. They would rather be

someplace else. It's unfortunate, because, what's going to become of our young

people?

<u>Student-Centered Innovation</u>

*Piikani* students are unique, every one of them; therefore, teachers and staff

members need to acknowledge the unique learning challenges of students exhibited on

the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. *Noonaki* describes being in a position to decide

collectively, how to respond, what resources were needed, and further trainings will be

needed. Therefore, she learned to ask the right questions to teachers, in order to help them

decide what can help a disengaged student learn:

They [students] don't learn the way the teacher is teaching. So, we have to as

administrators and as teachers, learn these things.

Public school systems on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation are closely tied to

measuring progress through base knowledge development. However, as *Noonaki* recalls,

curricular programs are intended to mirror nationally-based assessment standards, and

teachers are sometimes unable to include application of skills into their assessment of

learning. As a cultural norm of the *Piikani*, learning was done as a formative process

including the families or even the community in identifying a student's strengths early on

in their life. This allowed those around them to support their growth as a student, through mentorship and their experiences of applying their knowledge into skills. *Noonaki* stresses that learning cannot occur in a sedentary fashion; rather, it has to occur in the place, location, or event where those skills are able to be applied and refined. Therefore, *Noonaki* calls upon school leaders to accept the community as a source of knowledge for recommending to teachers and staff members, who can design learning experiences that not only allow students to apply their skills but to derive vocational meaning from them:

> I really believe in hands-on and living education and being a part of it by being an active participant… So, those are things, too, we need to capitalize, as educators, if you see a child that's really interested in something, we need to cultivate that interest and assist them in what it is. What is it that they want? How can we achieve this? The Piikani are hands on people and we learn by example, we learn by living it and you don't often get a chance to live a lot of things sitting in a desk, trying to keep up with the teacher and memorize things. It doesn't work. I could memorize books, exams word for word, period for period, go take a test and ace it and not remember what it was all about. And that's the way education is. I really believe in hands-on and living it and being a part of it and being an active participant. Kids learn mostly with a lot of hands-on, experimental. You go into the higher educational institutions and they have labs. They're working with their hands. They're working on things and that seems to be the way that people learned best. Traditionally, our way of learning was imitating our families, following them around, doing the things they were doing, learning hands on, and being

personally involved. We didn't sit in chairs for six to eight hours, trying to learn

from a text book.

Schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, like all other public Pre K-14

systems, are required to provide accommodations for students with relevant factors that

instituted an Individual Education Plan or IEP. *Noonaki,* in all of her school leadership

capacities followed the standard processes for supporting a student's learning

accommodations, which had to include them [school leaders], special education staff,

teachers, instructional staff members, parents, and the student. Customizing the education

of a student requires a willingness for all involved in an IEP to work collectively in

making decisions as to how the school is to respond to individual needs of students.

*Piikani* students especially those with learning difficulties, as *Noonaki* asserts, need to

find value in the knowledge they are expected to learn and identify tangible ways to

apply that into skills that will allow for a smooth transition from school to college or the

workforce. School leaders like *Noonaki* recognize the impact of school limitations on

accommodating for the needs of all students, as school resources are often not sufficient

other than to engage in the IEP process itself. Schools are often not able to support

student learning accommodations, therefore, according to *Noonaki*, translating student

needs into classroom practice is often replaced with the status quo, without teachers

seeing the need for their instruction to be adjusted or changed in its entirety to support the

learning needs of *Piikani* students. *Noonaki* had to find ways to provide the resources and

support special education staff, to accompany teachers, instructional staff members,

parents, and the student in implementing the design of their IEP, finding solutions that

lead to individualized successes, as *Noonaki* describes in this story:

> If we can find a solution for students to learn and work on their knowledge and
>
> skills, maybe education is not for them so they may need to learn how to work
>
> with their hands. They need to learn to have a trade if they struggle cognitively,
>
> let them do it physically. Let's see what they're good at! Students need to have
>
> guidance, acceptance, and the opportunity to be successful. We need to provide
>
> that opportunity to all the students. The students that I focused on, as a special
>
> education director, were those most in need of this. We had meetings, Individual
>
> Educational Plans, or IEP's, for these kids. That was important in helping the
>
> teachers accommodate their learning. It was a big issue that we constantly had to
>
> deal with because the teachers didn't seem to have enough time to work
>
> individually with them. We had to find ways to accommodate their learning to
>
> meet their needs and the expectations that we put upon them. We just had to take
>
> the time!

According to *Noonaki*, assessment of learning is focused solely on base

knowledge development; therefore, she encouraged teachers to invite new classroom

strategies that would accommodate for a variety of learning styles exhibited by *Piikani*

students. This tendency also pertains to when schools intend to provide learning

opportunities that include *Piikani* culture and language, according to *Noonaki*, that by

virtue of its transmission is active and not necessarily able to be confined in the walls of a

classroom. These student learning differences create a special challenge for school

leaders in optimizing the space available in the school and coordinating these efforts with teachers and staff members. *Noonaki* had to continuously rise to the occasion when ensuring that alternative accommodations could be met for the facilitation of a variety of learning mechanisms; therefore, training in curriculum development needs to be designed to attend to the wide spectrum of learning styles in an attempt to reach all students. Additionally, *Noonaki* tasks school leaders to recognize that learning is not confined only to the classroom, rather they should encourage teachers to find additional outlets to optimize learning experiences with students, as she illustrates in these two stories:

> A good teacher always has their kids moving! A good lesson can be a little bit noisy because it shows the kids are actively engaged in what they're doing. They're not just sitting there, listening to a lecture or writing on a piece of paper. Active and hands-on activities, I'm totally convinced that's the best way to teach! We have maybe twenty-five little people that all learn differently. None of them learn alike. Maybe one or two do, but everybody has a different learning style and that's got to be taken into consideration. If you don't, then we're just being pushed through as a mass of people!

> Our educational system needs to be more relaxed and more natural. Sitting in a chair, a hard wooden chair in some cases, half of the day does not make you learn better. We need to do more activities that are in a natural learning setting, where the kids are enjoying the activity they're doing. They have to be happy! When I did my observations, if a classroom was slightly noisy and kids laughing, I would stand and listen. That told me that it was a happy learning environment, because

those kids were involved in something they liked, they loved, and they were

willing to do the work. We find kids sitting at a desk, refusing to do paperwork,

refusing to pay attention while there's a lecture going on. As adults, we all know

lectures can be really boring. There's times we want to go to sleep and lose our

train of thought and that's what these kids have to go through, only they're much

younger and their tolerance for sitting still is not very long as we demand these

things of them. We say, "Oh, you sit still. You be quiet. Don't move!" Learning

does not occur a lot of times this way, and there's few students that can actually

pay attention and be on task, when that's going on, when they're having to sit for

long periods of time.

Generous school leaders share humor with teachers and staff members. Teachers

and staff members should be cognizant of the role of humor in the *Piikani* culture,

especially, as *Noonaki* explains, as it can be used to optimize instructional delivery and

capture student interests. Humor attaches meaning to knowledge, which in turn is

internalized in memory, which then translates into application; therefore, *Noonaki*

witnessed the use of humor into captivating students who do not respond well to the

typical classroom modalities or instruction. Humor can also be used in assessing the

student's performance, which if used to reinforce a skill can be an effective mechanism to

determine a student's information recall and/or correcting their mistakes. School leaders

should emphasize to teachers and staff members that the use of humor, according to

*Noonaki*, should be used to encourage and not discourage students, as the use of sarcasm

or other communication styles may come off as punitive or disrespectful:

A learning environment where you have kids laughing. They don't have to be rowdy, but even a noisy classroom, to me, is a sense of - they're doing what's comes naturally. They're doing what makes them happy. They're enjoying what they're doing. We don't necessarily have to be sitting at the desk all the time to be learning.

Students on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation are well accustomed to the digital age, as *Noonaki* recognizes from her observations of youth consistently using personal devices and are skilled in the use of computers and/or other tools that could be provided to them in the classroom. School leaders, as in *Noonaki's* example, had to encourage teachers and staff members to be knowledgeable and responsive to the current and potential uses of technology in the classroom, especially in assisting student to learn, apply, and assess their progress or skill development. Although technology usage is prevalent among students, in the case of the impoverished Blackfeet Indian Reservation access can be both limited and inconsistent depending on the availability of resources for technology and communication devices in the home. *Noonaki* has seen first-hand the emerging impact technology plays in our modern society; therefore, school leaders, teachers, and staff members have also increased their ability, not only make learning more applicable but in order to foster greater communication with stakeholders, through the school's website, social media outlets, and other methods that increased parental and community member awareness of the school. These innovations can be a challenge for a public school in accommodating and supporting the school-wide training and use of current technologies; however, *Noonaki* believes that school leaders, teachers, and staff

have to utilize technology to its highest potential to remain relevant, as describes in these

four stories:

> The term that I often heard was "user friendly" when technology came into our
> school system…How are they [students] going to survive in this world? It's
> getting to be a more complex to live in this world, with modern technology. But
> kids have learned that they can be very competitive in technology because of their
> games, their cell phones, and they're learning a lot more from television than they
> are in school!
>
> What some things worked years ago, do not work today because of the changing
> of times. The technology here, when the kids got so smart on technology in the
> schools and were faster than me. They could figure out things faster than me, I
> said, "It's time to retire!" Because I can't keep up with these little kids, these
> young kids, because technology was all new to us administrators. I got my
> training on an Apple computer and they don't even use Apples anymore! So, I had
> to retrain myself all the time! I have to look things up, reference things. I'd go to
> the classes, every time the district offered computer classes or learning new skills,
> I was there! This was truly a learning experience!
>
> Even with the technology here [Hutterite colony schools], we brought out
> computers, because that was a mandate for them to upgrade their technology.
> What's interesting is the cow barns have all the latest modern technology, but the
> community didn't want their kids playing games on the computers. They were
> adamant about not wanting the computers. They didn't want any outside influence

amongst their children so we had to assure them that it was all for educational

learning material that we were going to provide for the computers.

Their [teachers and staff members] complaint, here [Babb Elementary School],

too, like other teachers in other districts, was that they didn't have time. They

really didn't have time because they had to be super organized, very clever, and

talented into rotating the different studies and grades with multi-age students. We

enjoyed technology in the other school systems and in Babb, we had all kinds of

technology trainings that helped us to facilitate or accommodate students using

modern technology and making sure that we're up to date. To be up with the latest

scientific research, textbooks, and the best practices, we always have to have our

staff planning and training. But the purpose of the modern technology that was

used in the classroom was usually done and purchased by the computer

technology specialist. They kept us updated on all the modern material that was

available, disks, and so forth. So, everybody had a responsibility and school

leaders and the principals oftentimes weren't the ones that decided what we

needed for the schools to upgrade our equipment, textbooks, lesson plans, and our

curriculum. We worked on the curriculum in the spring, or the summer when the

school was out. When we spent the time as a whole district to improve and update

the equipment and the curriculum, we spent many hours as a group, working as

team, to update it. That was time consuming! But like I said, the principals and

the school leaders signed off on the purchases and they had the budget to decide

how much was spent on each item, but we didn't necessarily research which

program we would use to update to improve our academic endeavors.

The Blackfeet Indian Reservation is rural and remote, therefore its people,

especially those in outlying areas from the main population centers such as Browning,

interact with the land and its resources on a daily basis. *Piikani* student's whether or not

they have access to the land and its resources still can learn valuable lessons that

strengthen their connections to the culture and contemporary usage. *Noonaki* notes that

this is a common characteristic of smaller, more remote communities such as Babb and

Heart Butte; as these activities are forthcoming and essential to the survival of families

especially during the long and harsh winter months. School leaders, teachers, and staff

members need to respond to these activities in a way that accommodates for students to

be active participants in the maintenance of their rights as a *Piikani* and inherent

contributions to their families; therefore, *Noonaki* expresses a distinct reverence for youth

being engaged in these opportunities which can also be integrated into activities that the

school supports or providing experiences to students by granting them access to the land

and resources of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Schools need to emphasize that

students leave school with a collective understanding that school leaders, teachers, and

staff members are in support of students preserving tribal rights and responsibilities

toward the land, ensuring its commitment to provide critical teaching moments that

encourage future generational subsistence:

They're [Babb residents] not indoor people, so it's a different community to start

your career as an educator. If they went hunting, or if they went fishing, and if

they caught a fish or got a buck. Those are the simple things of life that a lot of people don't know how to do. The kids in town don't know how to fish, have never fished, they're never hunted, and some had never camped.

Positive reinforcement is a tool that is underutilized by school leaders, according to *Noonaki,* in schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. *Noonaki* encouraged teachers and staff members to impart positive reinforcement on students, in the event of an individual success or accomplishment. Although material rewards are good and sometimes needed by a student, school leaders also need to promote non-material rewards and recognitions that increase self-esteem and the reinforcement of *Piikani* cultural values. *Noonaki* encourages schools to devise incentives and rewards that are not limited to focus on academics and sports, but identify other ways for students to be successful that may not solely reflect mainstream notions of success or accomplishment. *Noonaki* expresses most positive reinforcement strategies are at no cost to the school, and should be normalized as well as recognize teachers and staff members for their contributions to the students, the school, and the community, as evident in three of her stories:

> We forget about rewarding our students because we focus so much on the negatives. Positives need to be articulated and pointed out for these students. Our successes were so different from the mainstream society. If one thing works for one student, if it solves that student's problem, then, you're required to use it for other students and it doesn't always work out for everyone else.

Everybody likes recognition! We all say we don't, but we like to be thanked and

recognized for the things we do and when it becomes so routine that nobody even

recognizes what you have tried. Staff appreciation is something that I've always

thought, "Hey, that's neat. Recognizing what the staff put in. But then that got to

be so, I guess, just a routine." It wasn't really an appreciation day, I think, it's just

a routine. "Okay, we're going to have a staff appreciation day!" We're going to

have these finger foods and we're going to have drawings for the certain prizes.

But I think more emphasis should be put in on the tremendous work that our staff

people have to do and the extracurricular activities that they have to and a lot of

volunteering of the teachers, rather than the parents.

*Noonaki* places importance on recognizing that student talents are not to be

restricted to purely academic preparation and rigor, but rather student interests are also

important. For students to feel like they belong at school, as *Noonaki* asserts, students

need to feel encouraged to explore interests which allow students to be prideful in their

abilities to express themselves through culture, art, song, and other forms of expression.

*Noonaki* expresses this in these four stories:

That's why it's so wonderful that they have a lot of arts in our curriculum, because

a lot of our students express their frustrations and their talents in artwork. There's

a statue in front of Napi Elementary School of a warrior… The kid that did that

sculpture was one of the kids that was a dropout, always in trouble. He wasn't

academically successful, so he went on to the Job Corps and he learned how to do

this sculpture and work with metal. When we bought that statue from him, he

belonged to the iron workers of Seattle, someplace in Seattle and he was making good money. His life had changed. My secretary who was with me at that time used to be a juvenile officer, I guess, or secretary and he told her, we turned around and had a kind of a dedication ceremony, he turned around and told her, he said, "I want to thank you for never giving up on me, because you didn't, you never gave up on me, all the times I was in that White Buffalo Home [former juvenile detention facility on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation] for misbehavior." Sometimes, our kids just really appreciate that. He became really successful, a wonderful family and then I heard he drowned on the coast around Oregon. Unfortunate drowning accident. I don't know the full story about it. But he was a success story… I learned that you had to be generous to them, be helpful… You have to be generous of your time. Just listening to a child, I believe, is the biggest generosity that a person can teach the students. That's accepting each other as we are, with our differences, our personal thoughts.

Going back to our traditional Blackfeet language here [Browning Middle School], we had a drum group. We had kids that were not acculturated so much, they come from traditional homes and they felt out of place in this European educational setting. They didn't fit in but with Indian Education for All and the Blackfeet Standards, we were able to accommodate what their personal needs were, to an extent. If they were raised traditionally and enjoyed going to pow wows and the drumming and singing, it was made available for them. They were not excluded from school activities, because they had activities here in the school for them.

When I was at the community college, we had the opportunity to have people come in and do workshops on jewelry and dress making. A number of different workshops that we offered the students. The interest wasn't there! It was mostly the staff that come and participated in these classes. I thought, "Oh how sad! How are their children going to learn to do this work? This beautiful, artistic work, when they're not interested? Their interest was someplace else then. We have so many of them now that are taking on this interest. But it was disappointing that at first, there wasn't that interest. So, it has to be generated in the home, in the community, the people that really feel, "Hey! I like that! I would like to see my children dance. I'd like to see my family be involved in these things." Again, this is where the parents and the community become involved. The students at the college, I thought, were so lacking of a sense of pride and eagerness to learn, or to do things for themselves. They weren't motivated! I left with a feeling of sadness for our younger parents now, because they just don't have that [cultural pride] some of them, but not all of them. Last night, we had a quite a few at that Holy Smoke [*Piikani* ceremony attended by the researcher and co-researcher during the data collection phase of this project] and they were dressed according to our custom. Their children were there, the young lady that was with them, one of the parents, was all dressed up. She had her moccasins and they took the time to make out and instill this sense of pride in our culture and in our language by bringing them [their children] to the Holy Smoke, teaching them. That was like a hands-on activity. It was participation.

The activities, the different clubs and so forth, were wonderful for different students. The problem we had was having the parents buy into it and participate. We had so few people that really were actively involved and we talk about the community being involved in our educational system and it's difficult, like I said, you can't do it yourself. You have to have the support of the community, the parents and the staff and the administrators to make things happen for kids. Eventually, things started progressing slowly. You see these outfits here, that we have for our pastime entertainment. There's a lot of talent. A lot of work into these. There's a lot of enjoyment that the kids learned. When they started learning that they were Native American, they got a sense of pride who they were.

### Flexibility

*Noonaki* sees that typical structures and norms of schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation do not recognize the need for flexibility when it comes to the students and community; rather, it is common that with heightened expectations on students, more limitations will exist to rigidly hinder possibilities. *Noonaki* expresses great doubt in our school systems changing the standard structure of Pre K – 14 education, as they lack the flexibility, which poses an insurmountable barrier to promoting learning experiences that encourage the integration of *Piikani* culture and language. Inflexibility of school schedules is a result of preoccupation with and driven by achievement aims. As *Noonaki* elaborates, that inflexibility also creates barriers for students being exposed to specialized subjects or courses that might fulfill an interest or help them to perform certain vocational

skills. Parent and community active participation can also be inhibited when school functions only allow for a narrow focus in supporting student learning.

The public schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation are a product of the shrinkage of the United States' once robust Indian boarding and mission school system. The public school system model typical of the school districts in Browning, Heart Butte, and East Glacier were set up in those areas and are established based on needed grade levels as evidence of student and community demographics. *Noonaki* characterizes the public school system as an imposed institution on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation; therefore, the public schools mimic structures that were designed to meet the educational demands of the Industrial Revolution and continue to be used as a tool for assimilation. *Noonaki* points to the public school experience as being vastly different than the *Piikani* style of education; as *Piikani* learning styles embraced individual skill development, encouraged mentorship, and solidified each individual's commitment to making contributions to the community. *Noonaki* believes that this style embraced individual developmental time rather than satisfied modern Gregorian or euro-centric concepts of time; thus students educational pace was determined by the rate of their development, rather than calendar age, perpetuated by established school structures, as *Noonaki* conveys in a story:

> Our educational system changed from being a gradual and flexible process, to a very rigid, demanding curriculum as the European style of education became dominant on our reservations.

School leaders, teachers, and staff members, as *Noonaki* contends, should understand that they can bend, but not break when it comes to enforcing student expectations. Particular situations encountered with students may warrant flexibility or school leaders accommodating a student's needs on a case-by-case basis; this is stemming from each individual's awareness and acceptance of student concerns or issues, that may signal a deviation from school norms or expectations. *Noonaki* feels that schools allowing students to actively make reasonable choices about their education should be accompanied with the expectation of them not blatantly breaking school rules set for them to follow. Generous school leaders, teachers, and staff members, as *Noonaki* stresses, support one another and are cognizant of the time they take from each other in assisting or mitigating issues they experience. *Noonaki* recognizes that time is not a luxury many of them have in their day-to-day functions in the school, as she explained in these four stories:

> We have to be user friendly to the kids! They have to be able to come to you and feel secure talking to you about whatever their issues are. I had a young boy at the Browning Middle School come in, he said, "[name omitted], can I use the staff toilet?" I said, "Oh well, yeah, but why? You have toilets out there?" He said, "Because I'm scared to go into there and use the toilet!" I never thought that would be an issue for a student. How can a student learn when he's fearful of even going in to take care of his personal needs? So, that is one of the points that still linger in my brain. There's so many issues that these kids encounter in our school system, so many different issues! You've got to be able to answer these questions

as an educator. A lot of times we brush these kids off! I don't have time, I've got to do this and I've got to do that! We're put on Earth, I believe, to make accomplishments and to make your life better for yourself, despite things not going good. As educators, this is what we need to do to instill in our students that they have to right to decide, what it is in life that they want.

I get so frustrated when I go to see somebody, when I thought that I had an important issue to discuss and they'd say, "Oh no! We don't have time! We've got to go in this meeting. We've got to do this. They don't, cannot take the time and say, just a minute, let me see if I can delay this for a second and we'll deal with this. People kind of like that moment just to be quiet sometimes, just to take the time to unwind and I think, when you do that, you're also very generous with that time unscheduled to let the people unwind, because as educators, we are so busy on a daily basis, from the time we get to school from the time teachers get to school. We're moving, we're talking, we're taking care of kids, and we're just constantly on the go!

I may have to change my way of dealing with this [a personal or professional challenge]and I'm just going to patiently wait and wait it out and see, instead of rushing them and telling them you've got to do this, you've got to do that, you need to go here, you need to go there. We're just going to wait this out and I think she will outgrow it. Because her brother [*Noonaki's* grandson], this junior year in high school, has changed him a lot. He's doing so much more. Personally, he's doing a lot better. I'm thinking she will, too, because of my time as a patient

grandparent and just being there for her. A lot of times that's what these kids need, is just somebody to be there for them.

When people think about generosity, we think, well, we'll give them money, we'll give them this and that. But it's just the time that you donate to a person is generosity. Young people don't understand that. They don't have time. They're impatient. The ceremony last night was a lesson on patience. My mother used to say patience was long suffering and for the longest time when I was younger, I couldn't understand that, because I wanted to do things and things had to happen right now. I was a very impatient person, but as I got older I learned that you have to take your time. I mentioned before that I don't make hasty decisions. I don't answer a person right away.

Schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation place special emphasis in designing and implementing interventions for students that struggle academically, however as *Noonaki* discusses, it is not common to actively identify students that may be accustomed to certain learning styles or possess knowledge and/or skills that the school is unable to provide or support. *Noonaki* linked behavior problems exhibited by students as a response to the dysfunction of their homes; however, it was also found to be related to their boredom in the classroom and limited engagement. This increases the likelihood of students being defiant to course expectations or activities. *Noonaki* calls upon school leaders to promote alternatives for students who do not respond well to the conventional classroom environments; thus, working with teachers, staff members, and parents to design alternative plans, as *Noonaki* explains in this story:

When the mom and dad of who I thought was a gifted and talented kid came in to talk to me, I suggested maybe they should take him to Blackfeet Community College and have him tested for a GED, just to find out how academically strong he was. And low and behold, they did and he passed all the GED courses, except, I think it was math! He had to go back and take math over again. That proved my point, that he was gifted and talented. Bored in the class!  What we need to do is tap into the students' interests. We keep them sitting in desks and they get bored, restless, start fidgeting, and they get in trouble for being disruptive.

Public school curriculums, as mandated, have allowed very little room for schools like those on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation to meaningfully integrate *Piikani* culture and language, according to *Noonaki*. Not emphasizing the importance and utility of the *Piikani* culture and language has caused schools to compartmentalize and keep integration of this separate from the curriculum. *Noonaki* relates this challenge to the overall curriculum being dictated by programs and standardized achievement measurement aims, from outside of the community which has slowed the emphasis toward schools finding ways to integrate *Piikani* culture and language into the curriculum itself:

> There was a separate class for Blackfeet language and Native American Studies aside from the required curriculum. My personal belief is that you cannot separate things as everything has to connect. If there's no connection, then we're not going to be successful. It took time and under the structure of the curriculum we didn't

have the time to do that. So it was separated with no connectedness to what else they were learning.

*Noonaki* sees school leader flexibility as often taken advantage of by the school districts on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, as district boards or administrators tend to design administrative positions that according to *Noonaki,* "wear a lot of hats." School leader duties being broadly and at times task intensive can result in more unnatural pressures on those in these positions. This is especially true when you also factor the rural setting and the actual time a school leader gets to devote to each of their responsibilities and be successful, as *Noonaki* explains in this story:

At the Babb Elementary School, I only came out here one day a week. I was the principal for the three rural schools and I was special education director for eight schools. That limited my time because I had to spend it in each school. Special education took a substantial amount of time for meetings on students to come up with their Individual Education Plans. It was meetings with parents that were sometimes unhappy or that they didn't feel that their children's educational needs were being met. I spent most of my time just doing paperwork and meetings. With the principal portion of my job, I had time to go in and was required to go into every classroom, in every school, and do observations for every teacher once a week. We had to document the days that we were there, how long we observed, and the report on each teacher had to be submitted to the school administration. So, we were on the run! I felt like I was. I was spread very thin!

On the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, the communities of Browning, Heart Butte, Babb, Starr School, and East Glacier are geographically remote and a substantial distance from one another. *Noonaki* recognized the impact geography and long distances had placed a strain on school resources, as well as efforts to ensure student access and educational equity, as she explains in these two stories:

When you are the special education director for eight schools and rural school principal for three, the travel took up some time. It took an hour or so to get out here to Babb! In bad weather, which was all winter long, it took us longer to get out here. I never missed a day! Maybe one or two, where I had to go to another function in town or a training. Specialists came out one day a week, if they weren't held up in town. I missed out sometimes. I had to be out here every week and it was a joy and fun to come out here. Parents always wanted more assistance from the school counselors and even the school board members from here would bring that up in board meetings. The answer we got from the superintendent was that the amount of time was allotted for a little school is based on the enrollment. When you have six hundred students in town, there was very little time for the students in the rural schools to have access to counselors. The same with the specialty staff. The speech language pathologists, the audiologists, and the school psychs were out here one day a week and their time with the kids was limited, very limited. There was times that these kids that were really struggling and needed the support that all the other students got in town, so little time allotted for them.

When you take into consideration the population that you're working with, a lot of times, you have to be flexible and change to meet the needs of the children, because if you don't and you go strictly by these best practices and this scientific research studies that don't work, you're wasting your time and you're wasting money… Paying thousands of dollars to bring in a program. That's what a lot of these companies want, these textbook companies bring in all this material. We spend thousands and thousands of dollars buying this stuff and then we try them for a year or two and we find out they don't work and then they get stashed someplace and that's what happened in the school district. You go down there in the basement and there's just things there, piled up, that didn't work! So, my recommendations for Native American students is bring the people in that know the students. Bring the people that know the residents of the community. Bring the families in, they can tell you! They'll tell you what works and doesn't work! Instead of buying these books and spending lots of money. But that's my personal opinion and I get overruled a lot of times and that's okay.

The availability of funds to enact certain activities and initiatives, according to *Noonaki*, should reflect school priorities, not the personal ambitions of a school leader, as such self-serving behavior can lead to abuses and mismanagement of school resources:

Having enough funds to meet all the needs of the teachers, the students, and the school buildings can be a problem because you have a budget and that budget, you have to live on!  And you have to sit and figure out where the need is the most. Oftentimes, there was things, I guess we'd call them luxuries or things we

wanted, but we had to go with what was needed the most in the building and as educational leaders. That was our responsibility, to make sure the budget was set and we didn't go over the budget. The money was well spent because we could not, I guess, misuse the funds.

Time on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation is synonymous with the concept of "Indian time." "Indian time" is a term used to describe the lack of conscious effort to recognize that an event is to occur in a particular set time. Rather, events occur when they happen and are not rigidly defined to a certain timeframe. *Noonaki* asserts that, accepting time and its use as a school leader, cannot be realized solely through the linear concept, as it ignores the community norms and cultural constructions that established how time is recognized as a component of daily life. School leaders need to not hold on to hardened expectations of linear time, and as *Noonaki* emphasizes, understand that things do not (and will not always) occur on or in a timely manner: therefore, school leaders and the community can only accept that events (or other functions) happen when they occur. Internalized flexibility for time can make a school leader more cognizant of the pressures that dictate how the use of time is assessed on a case by case basis. *Noonaki* relates the community norms around time, exist for the purpose of finding comfort and convenience in not knowing how things will materialize, but that they will eventually occur, as she explains in these five stories:

> You have to be able to adapt. I guess, in a case like that, my recommendation would be just listen and watch for what the people want. If the people want a rigid schedule time, then go with the rigid schedule time. If it's going to be "Indian

time," it's less stressful and you have to learn to be patient and that's another form of being generous, generous of your time and your patience. And if it's important, whatever it is that you're up to, the task that you want to complete, it'll happen sooner or later. This is the way they functioned, I thought, well, you know, that's kind of neat.  Because we stress ourselves out so much sometimes, getting all upset about time and time is pretty precious, because our time on earth is very short and limited. We should live our life to the fullest, but on a positive note, being happy and not stressed out. It's so hard, because I used to get so stressed out.

And in some instances, I think it's [Indian time] important.  Like I said, when I went to college, back to school, I was a forty-five-year-old senior citizen that was in school with all these young people.  In order to maintain and learn and keep up with these young people, I had to go on a time management schedule.  And for my well-being, it was all for me.  And it worked out fine for me, but other students, you know, used the time - Indian time schedules and oftentimes they got themselves in a lot of trouble because they didn't schedule enough time for them to complete the task or goal that they were after.  So, there's a conflict there between Indian time and our standard time, I guess.

We are not so rushed out here [Babb Elementary School]! We're half-way in between Indian-time and Mountain Standard Time here in our area. It is much more relaxed in a smaller school setting. I could come in here, sit down, eat with the students, and enjoy a conversation with them. They still had to be on that time

schedule, but because there weren't so many kids, it was a little more relaxed for the students.

I ran into a real frustrating experience, because the people didn't care about the time. Time was their generosity.  If they wanted or if you wanted them there for something, they'd be there on their time. That's where the "Indian Time" comes into conflict with our European standard of being on time. "Indian Time," they used to tell me, if something is going to happen, it's going to happen. Why stress yourself out over rushing around and trying to get there on time? A lot of car accidents happen because people rush, injuries happen because you're rushing, and that's what happened to me many times working for the school district. I'd be rushing from one building to another, trying to be there on time for the classes that I had to be in and I fell quite a few times.  In fact, I fell right in front of the school administration building and I tripped on the sidewalk and almost hit that big rock out in front head first and I've had so many surgeries over it.  But that was me trying to maintain that schedule, that time schedule.

When I went to Red Crow Community College, we had to set up a meeting at one of the communities just outside of Cardston. We planned to schedule the program to start at 8:00 in the morning. I got up about five o'clock here in Browning, got ready and I drove across the line, across the Canadian and American border and I got to Red Crow Community College. I got to the community center where we were supposed to have the workshop. I sat out there and waited and waited and nobody showed up and I thought, "am I at the right place? Did I forget? Did

somebody change the time and the place for me?" So, then I proceeded. I went

out to Red Crow Community College. And I got there, went inside, nobody was

there. I thought, "What is going on? Did I totally mess up today?" So, I walked

around the school and waited for a while there. So, then I got back in my vehicle

and went back to the community center at Moses Lake and sat out there in the

front. Finally, somebody showed up to open the doors and I went in. And then

gradually people walked in and set up their stations for the workshop. I was all

frazzled out and stressed out because of needing to be on time and wanting to get

everything started on schedule. Nobody was concerned about it! The president of

the college wasn't concerned. The other staff members and participants weren't

concerned. I thought to myself, "Why did I stress myself out over this? I have to

learn to take care of myself and I have to learn just to go with the flow." That was

one of the toughest things, because my husband had instilled in me to be on time

all the time, and for me to be on "Indian time," it was hard for me to change.

Then, I come back to Browning and I was back on the other time schedule.

School leaders, teachers, staff, and students operate under daily time expectations

that limit flexibility, and as *Noonaki* says, this expectation can negatively impact the

school's environment and ability for teachers and staff members to accommodate

students, many of them needing more time or resources to meet classroom expectations.

As school leaders set the tone of the schools they lead, *Noonaki* believes that it is

important to not have a preoccupation to being restrictive or demanding on the time that

teachers, staff members, and students need to be successful, as she explains in these three

stories:

> There's so much hurrying and rushing through things! I find that that's a fault of
>
> our society. Our demands on the children, demands on the teachers, demands on
>
> the cooks, and so forth. They have to be on a rigid time schedule all the time.  I
>
> believe time schedules are good but then other times I don't believe they should
>
> be so rigid.
>
> We have to keep in mind and so we have to be flexible. One of the key points, I
>
> think, is flexibility. I always considered myself to be a very flexible person. I
>
> don't like rules and regulations, if I can get away from them! They're important!
>
> You have to follow them! But there's times, too, you have to be flexible.
>
> Flexibility is a gift that oftentimes, but if you're not flexible and you're too rigid,
>
> then you're not reaching the people that you're working with, like the staff or
>
> children. The morale with the staff gets very bad because they lack that flexibility.
>
> We can't give up on our students. We can't throw the towel in, as we might say.
>
> It's frustrating sometimes because you try things and they don't work out. But you
>
> don't just quit. You have to come up with a new plan, I found out that we
>
> shouldn't do things in a haste. Haste makes waste, they say. I always like to think
>
> about things, I respond slowly sometimes to a question, I don't have an immediate
>
> answer. At a school board meeting one time, I was asked a question, and I was
>
> pondering "how am I going to answer this? What's the best way?" One of the new
>
> principals, answered for me and that annoyed me. I said, "Don't you ever answer

for me again. I know the answer and let me present it in my own way." That's the thing you have to do, is think about these things. Weigh the consequences. Weigh the positives and the negatives of each situation. We have too many people that are hasty and impulsive and they're judgmental. Sometimes these are the people that shouldn't be in our educational system, I feel. I think when you are dealing with people, with young people, you really need to think things out thoroughly and weigh things out. That's one thing I learned at the Browning Middle School.

School leaders are tasked with balancing many duties. However, some of their duties require them to be away from the teachers, staff members, and students they are leading. As the public schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation are state and federally funded, *Noonaki* explains that in order for the schools to receive funding, school leaders are tasked with reporting school demographics that provide information used to calculate the amount that the school will receive as a budget for salaries, operations, and grant funded programs. The bulk of federal funding that funds the public schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservations comes from what is referred to as "impact aid." "Impact aid" is federal funding given to school districts whose ability to obtain local government funding through stakeholder taxes and levies is severely limited due to the presence of the federal government; therefore, as in the case of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation these reports are lengthy, often complicated, and ever changing, and take a considerable amount of time away from the school leader to focus on the teachers, staff members, and students. *Noonaki* recommends that school leaders delegate reporting duties to other staff who can collect and track data related to reporting requirements, as well as in putting the

information for the school leader that they are responsible for. She remembers these tasks

taking a great deal of coordination and added stress on the part of a school leader as they

depend on others who are also using their time to compile information for reporting. As

*Noonaki* came to realize, these state and federal reports are also burdened with deadlines

that are non-negotiable and penalties will be assessed or funding can be withheld, if

submitted late, as she tells in this story:

> When I was the principal, the majority of my time, when it came time to write up
>
> reports, was spent sitting on the computer preparing reports. Sometimes it was a
>
> devastating experience for me because they went through the state office. All the
>
> information we put in there was wiped out and we didn't have time to redo all the
>
> scores and other school information. These reports are critical and they were lost
>
> because the superintendent didn't get on their portion immediately. She got on the
>
> program the last day it was due and then sat there and never said a word about
>
> what she caused, which was more time I had to spend correcting her error. I have
>
> to deal with that and put aside what I was doing. That takes up your time, your
>
> precious time when it comes to education… The feds mandated what had to be
>
> improved. So, my job as an administrator and a leader was very, very stressful
>
> and was time consuming. But I loved the job. I loved being around the people. I
>
> loved being around the students.

Students and parents can be unpredictable, even in response to the standardized,

structured, and the well-documented environment of the school. *Noonaki* recalls that

addressing behaviors and conflicts that are brought into the school from the community

took up a substantial amount of her time as a school leader. Behaviors are also a reflection of the student's development, especially in the adolescent years that are raked with many personal challenges, as noted by *Noonaki*. Students and parents, regardless of how they respond to the school's expectations, can choose to disapprove or support the decision of the school leader. As *Noonaki* believes that students and parents are still entitled to the time of the school leader, teachers, and staff members to resolve issues that could get worse if not addressed. As a school leader it is not acceptable to "pass the buck to another party" or deflect the situation, as *Noonaki* said, everyone expected her to be reliable, fair, and not a push over. Policies and procedures of the school are an attempt to ensure equity and act as a road map for school leaders, but *Noonaki* remembers the challenge of promptly and appropriately articulating these expectations to stakeholders:

> A lot of times, the parents that come in here unhappy take that time away from us, as educators, because we have to spend time in a conference trying to explain our stand on certain issues, especially behavior. If there's behaviors, these we have to deal with it! Babb Elementary School behavior problems were not that great. Just minor things mostly, but we still had disciplinary problems, especially with the girls! They get a certain age and one day, three of them will be getting along just fine and the next day, two of them will be fighting one and it's just an ongoing thing because of the personal changes they're going through. And to try and resolve their little issues, gets very time consuming and it's even more time consuming when the parents get involved, get right in the middle of it.

The first school leaders and teachers in schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation were mostly, if not entirely, non-Native and not locally sourced. In the past twenty or thirty years, the schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation teacher and staff member demographics have become increasingly more Native, predominantly *Piikani* and/or locally sourced. This shift has allowed for a lot of progress with regards to the school district's integration of *Piikani* culture, language, and progressive strategies specific to meeting the needs of *Piikani* learners. *Noonaki* believes that locally sourced staff, whether *Piikani* or non-native, tend to stay longer and have deeper connections to the community which equates to their commitment to supporting student needs through their position at the school. *Noonaki* urges school leaders to nurture good teachers and staff members, as many of them spend more time with the students than their own families at times and are always willing to help when needed:

> One teacher told me she taught out here [Babb Elementary School] and stayed here all those years because her husband went to school out here. She felt that not having the consistency of the same teacher each year like he experienced, really made him feel kind of defeated. He [her husband] always wanted a teacher that would stay out here and that gave him a sense of, a teacher that really wanted to work with him and really wanted to be here. Rather than just a job or just a paycheck as some of them would come and go. As Maslow wrote, the fulfillment of basic human needs, that he observed, required a lot of help from consensual voluntary assistance from other people, that he observed.

School leaders are the "glue that holds community-school relations together," according to *Noonaki*, who learned to seek resources outside of the school district for the students. This is true especially in communities like the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, where many needed services are not sustained if supported by the school district solely, or as the availability of resources exist. *Noonaki* emphasizes that school leaders need to not be insular in their thinking about only what the school does, but recognize how other individuals, groups, and organizations can contribute to student needs and engage them. *Noonaki* calls upon school leaders to seek partnerships from the Blackfeet Tribe and potentially other local entities (and abroad), to continue to work with them to best accommodate both basic educational and extra-curricular needs of students on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Partnerships release undue hardship on the schools and its personnel to manage such efforts, therefore, *Noonaki* feels that distributing resources from the community can lead the school to open up to the community for help:

> We had formed committees too! The JOM [Johnson O'Malley] committee would buy clothes, shoes and other stuff for the needy children. I believe they still do that, buying sports outfits for kids like basketball shoes and specialized shoes so they can participate in the sports.

*Noonaki* expands generosity beyond the material acquisition of resources and funding used to operate schools. Generous or *aahsitapiitsin* (sharing) school leaders impart generosity on to others to build to collective commitments among all school stakeholders. Collective commitments are critical in strengthening responses toward students. This includes teachers (and staff members) being committed to professional

development that helps them to respond to emerging students' needs. *Piikani* education requires curricular innovation and looking beyond the traditional classroom, which means integrating technology as well as *Piikani* culture and language throughout the curriculum, functions, and services provided by the school. The relevant focus of a school should also keep in mind the changes in flexibility with time and scheduling that will need to be addressed in order to accommodate evolving community expectations and student needs. Giving and sharing with the students, teachers, staff members, parents, and community members, are at the core of *Piikani* concept of *Waattosin* or "living good" through spirituality, which is essential to a school leader showing good will in their decisions to ensure resources are allocated where they are most needed.

CHAPTER EIGHT: *WAAT-TO-SI*N

[SPIRITUALITY] OR "LIVING GOOD"

*Noonaki's* next stories reflect the importance of the *Piikani* concept of spirituality as a tool for school leaders to align their personal integrity to cope with and persevere, despite challenges they face both personally and professionally. She describes this concept in her own words as:

> Spirituality. *Waatoosin*. Living good! We're very spiritual people. We don't just go to church on one day a week and think that satisfies our spiritual needs, our people get up in the morning and greet the day with spirituality, praying. When we meet to meetings, before we even start the meeting, we pray. Before we eat, we pray. At night, before we go to bed, we pray and thank the Creator for the day that we had. A lot of people will go out and greet the sun in the morning and pray for a good day. And in the evening, they'll pray to thank the Creator for what they accomplished and obtained for that day… The spirituality in our culture is talking from the heart. You're talking from your daily experience. You're being thankful for what you had accomplished, what you had obtained, and what the day brought you. So, prayer, spirituality is a great part of our culture, as it sustains us!

*Noonaki* reflects that the resurgence of spirituality among the *Piikani*, brings the recognition that the boarding schools contributed greatly to the spiritual decline of the *Piikani*. The spiritual practices that *Noonaki* was accustomed to as a young child, were then replaced by the Christian belief system:

Spirituality is deep-seated in our culture and the boarding schools didn't do anything to reinforce that. We were forced! We would get up and we were forced to go down to the chapel and kneel and pray. Those prayers didn't mean anything to us because they were led by the ministers and were written in a book in an attempt to control our life. At nights, we were forced to go up to our rooms, where we had to kneel down and pray. Sometimes, our knees hurt, because the prayers took forever. When you're little, it might be a short five-minute prayer but to us, it was an eternity!

Spiritual decline occurred when students were told that their traditional practices and their language were not acceptable, and as *Noonaki* felt, everything about her was not accepted. Imposed Christian beliefs placed on *Noonaki*, left her feeling lost and conflicted about her spiritual existence:

I was an Anglican, and my folks were so indoctrinated and acculturated that they didn't talk *Piikani* to us, very seldom they did. They talked English to us. We were put into an Anglican boarding school and we were supposed to come out as Christians and not "heathens" or whatever the word is. So I hated religion! I thought, if I ever step into another church, I think I'll just keel over! That was basically my thought when I got married and moved over to Browning. Religion is just not for me. I'm sick of it being thrown in my face! I'm sick of it dominating and controlling my life! After boarding school, I was kind of lost and felt like my feet were just floating around and I didn't know where I was or who I was.

Personal Integrity

School leaders need to model personal integrity as a reflection of their spiritual health according to *Noonaki*. She points to school leader's reputations preceding them through their actions and demeanor; therefore, the community will form a consensus on how they view a school leader's performance, contributions to the school, and their spiritual fitness to assume their role.

Boarding schools are recognized as a key experience that shaped the *Piikani* educational experience, as in the case of *Noonaki,* whose spirituality was replaced with religion. This left many *Piikani* without a balanced perspective on spirituality, which has created hardships for families that had no choice but to send their children to boarding schools to become Christianized. *Noonaki* recalls that traumas being inflicted on boarding school students, which precipitated resentment against their parents, community, and the tribe for allowing them to be taken away from the only world they knew. *Noonaki,* as a school leader recognized these factors as connected to traumas endured in the past, especially when interacting with the parents and the community, as she explains in this story:

> It took me a long time to get a balance in my life, because of the boarding school, where I was raised without input from my parents. I was pretty angry at my family and I didn't realize it for many years that I was angry and that anger carried on into my adulthood.

*Noonaki* asserts that what was taken away from the students was their identity. Spiritually wounded and made to think negatively about their traditions, former boarding

school students, like *Noonaki*, began to revert back and re-engage with their communities in ways that started to give them spiritual clarity and understanding. School leaders need to act for themselves, according to *Noonaki*, to seek spiritual practices that allow them to have the capacity to help students. *Noonaki* observed that those who sought guidance from traditional spiritual practices were then able to help students form those same connections:

> When I started getting into our traditions, I started finding who I was and where I came from! When I was teaching at Red Crow Community College, the sad thing is some of our adult students came in and I'd ask them questions like, "Well, who are you? Tell me, who's your family? I'll know you, but a lot of them didn't know their families." They were all so disconnected. This is where Narcisse [Blood] would always come in. We need to be connected! We're all related! It was amazing for those students that sat there with their head down at the start, then at the end of the class or the semester, they were just bubbly! They found out who they were. What their identity was. I had them bring a story of a family hero and they just had a lot of pride, they just blossomed when they started talking about their families. They weren't ashamed anymore! They were revived, that's the way it looked to me. I'm a good teacher because I was able to do this for these people who had so little in their life and so little to go by. I think that's so important that our spirituality brings us back to who we are… My choice is the Native American spirituality because it is the Anglican religion that indoctrinated and acculturated my folks, so that they didn't talk Blackfoot to us. They talked English to us…So, I

was kind of lost. I felt like my feet were just floating around and I really didn't

know who I was, where I was, or what I was. But, when I started getting into our

Native American traditions, I started finding out who I was, what I was, and

where I came from.

Self-reflection through spirituality allowed *Noonaki* to see possibilities to improve

themselves in ways that imparted a continuous pattern of behaviors that promoted her

self-enrichment. School leaders are engaged in spirituality as an interconnected process,

as they not only model behaviors for others, but are open and willing to guide students

into making choices that build for them the personal integrity needed to be successful.

*Noonaki* expands upon this in a story:

I'm still learning how to be a good person, I guess. We all want to be good people!

To be a good person, we have to be connected to the good things. We have to be

connected to the things that we value in life. The things that make our life

comfortable. The things that make our life good.

Spirituality creates bonds that bring families together as practitioners as a

collective, as *Noonaki* relates this to individuals yearning for (and to) support one another

and overcome challenges, and as she believes, positioning students to be academically

successful. *Noonaki* urges school leaders to be supportive to the spiritual needs of

students, as well as provide access to opportunities for students to obtain spiritual

guidance and growth, if they want it:

Students that came from a middle class home situation with two parents, in a structured home and had a religious or spiritual base, thrived much better than the students that didn't!

State and federally funded schools are subject to the separation between church and state; therefore, it is perceived that spirituality and religion are not a formative factor in student development and, *Noonaki* staunchly disagrees with this notion. School leaders need to tread lightly when it comes to spirituality, which according to *Noonaki*, "is unfortunate as spirituality is a big part of the local community culture." They need to provide student access to growing spiritually, but not in a manner that endorses one belief system over another, and support acceptance of spiritual diversity. Spiritual guidance received through prayer or ceremony, according to *Noonaki*, can open the eyes of others within the school system to see the connections between cultural values and education. *Noonaki* stresses that spirituality is a personal choice and that multiple belief systems exist on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. This creates a special dynamic impacting each individual's capacity to leverage their belief systems as they support students in ways that promote self-awareness and spiritual fitness. *Noonaki* says "all people can help the school, regardless of their spiritual or religious affiliations." *Noonaki* describes this in a story:

> Spirituality and our government school system are separated. But, you have to have spirituality in order to be a kind and generous person. If you don't have that spirituality, you have a tendency to overlook these values that are so important in

our Native American culture. I think that's so important and our spirituality brings us back to who we are. Who are you? What is your main goal in life?

Life experiences have a direct impact on personal spiritual or religious beliefs as seen in the case of *Noonaki*. She asserts that school leaders need to channel spiritual power for the acceptance of multiple belief systems that are a part of the community and be open to divulging to others, their own beliefs and values:

I never was very spiritual because of the boarding school. You can't force religion on people. They have to have freedom of choice. Religious faiths have their values that they teach you through spirituality. Spirituality is believing! But here's other ways you can be spiritual… We have our different religious groups and beliefs on the Blackfeet Reservation, so we have to respect for everybody else's beliefs, culture, and their spirituality…So spirituality means we're all interconnected with other religions. We all have our rituals that we go through but when you stop and think about it, a lot of them, when you start studying, are very similar and only a little different… I could go on about spirituality all the time. In our educational system it is not allowed to bring religious traditions into the schools, but you can be spiritual in a way that the students will become aware of it. Eventually teachers and staff will let them express it in their own practice, talk about it, and be cognizant about their own religious beliefs. That will not be bringing the religious traditions in to the school, rather it's just bringing knowledge into the schools of other religions and it don't hurt for them [the students] to know about spirituality and other religions.

School leaders are entrusted to make decisions that can impact entire school districts. *Noonaki* used her spirituality and participation in ceremony, as a means to gain clarity and help her weigh options when faced with a tough decision. School leaders can rely on spirituality as a means to put meaningful thought to moral and ethical dilemmas that may be created by their decisions. *Noonaki* explains her process in a story:

> Let's pray about it and sleep on it, before we make a major decision. Let's not be hasty and too many times, we're impulsive. I had people stand there and want me to make a decision right now!

Spiritual expression through prayer is the most common practice among spiritual and religious belief systems on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Prayer has the potential to bring others, even of other belief systems, together to meaningfully discuss and work toward accomplishing what will benefit the students. School leaders should encourage the use of prayer, or the less technical term of blessings, to ground individuals in doing collective work, as *Noonaki* describes in a story:

> I know prayer is not a part of our educational system, but it's a part of our life! It has to be, in order to be a whole person, I believe. This is my personal belief and it's what's changed my life for the better. I am a more rounded person.

Self-Sustaining Practices

Self-care or sustainability is not easily integrated into the demands of a school leaders who, as *Noonaki* confirms, frequently sacrifice themselves and their own health to promote the things they want for other people. Spirituality provides for a tangible outlet for school leaders to find a balance in an often chaotic and unforgiving school environment.

Spirituality can be a life changing experience, especially when a void existed previously, as *Noonaki* can attest to. If someone is hesitant to put themselves in a position to obtain spiritual teachings, it is never too late to find or seek that guidance. Spirituality is a personal endeavor, according to *Noonaki* in these two stories:

Spirituality in whatever form it may be, has the potential to grant the focus and initiative needed to perform school leader duties or overcome personal challenges… Spirituality is a great part of our culture. And it sustains us. We have a lot of social problems on the reservations. Those that get real spiritual and learn of our way of life, then turn around and help other people. When I started changing my life into becoming more spiritual, I went to sweats. Blackfeet women, they're not supposed to go into sweats. But I needed something! I needed something spiritual that would satisfy my feelings of inadequacy and remove them from my mind. In the sweats, you're sitting there and it's intense praying. It can get really hot! And in that sweat you're praying for your cleansing of the body, mind, and soul. You come out of there sometimes so weak. The first few times, it's really tough!

I had to learn to ask for spiritual assistance. I had to connect all of the things that

were important in our values for myself. I had to find out what our values were, in

our culture, in order for me to find out who I was. We have to live our values! We

cannot just voice them. We have to live them on a daily basis. You have to be

thankful for the day before you and thank the Creator, the Lord, or whoever your

higher power is for it.

Spirituality is what connects the physical, mental, and emotional domains of each

individual person's life; as seen in the Medicine Wheel, which *Noonaki* believes

represents a visual understanding of the complementary balance that is needed to increase

personal fortitude in resolving or undertaking the role of a school leader:

You need to take care of your mind and keep your body in shape, because it is a

tough job! It is not an easy job and that stuck in my mind all the time! You have

to be physically, mentally, spiritually ready to deal with all of the issues that you

deal with as a leader.

*Piikani* concepts of spirituality form the basis for which interconnections are

described in the Medicine Wheel, that articulate for the individual what it means to live a

balanced and successful life. Also integrated are the *Piikani* values that define for each

person how they are to interact and assist one another in ways that maintain balance and

deemphasize negative factors that can place hardships on school leaders. The medicine

wheel is the basis for the Blackfeet Education Standards (2005), as *Noonaki* explains its

connections in a story:

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs makes me think of the medicine wheel, where we have to have our life in balance. If our spiritual, mental, physical, or emotional self is not balanced in al1 of those categories, then we run into problems, personal problems, usually… The medicine wheel of our religious traditions, teaches that you have to be balanced emotionally, physically, spiritually, and all these combined with your value system. You don't separate them. You have to be all, it's ongoing, and it's all together. Togetherness is what keeps us intact in our homes, even in our schools, and even in our relationships. We have to do things together. We have to stay firm and consistent.  You can't practice spirituality without the rest of the values.

Situations that school leaders encounter are not all positive, and according to *Noonaki*, many community dynamics contribute negativity and can create stress beyond measure. Spirituality can bring relief, however, as *Noonaki* explains, it can also present its own hardships or lessons if they are not personally grounded or represent malicious intent. When school leaders seek spiritual guidance, as *Noonaki* emphasizes, "it is important to pray for things that bring positivity and prosperity," not only for what they personally want or need. Being spiritually grounded is wanting good things for other people and seeking those outlets of spirituality. *Noonaki* believes that this allows for the school leader to live and be cognizant of their own spiritual powers, as she tells in these two stories:

Life isn't given to us on a silver platter! We have to make the best of what it is! Oftentimes, we wish for more and they always say be careful what you wish for,

especially when it comes to spirituality. We will pray for things that we think we need and actually we don't. You can't teach it in school! But you can live it! You live your spirituality! There's so many problems and so many obstacles in life that a person has to overcome, especially on Indian reservations or in our public schools. Like I talked about earlier, kids bring in a lot of baggage and we do as adults too! We have to work through everything and it's like a cleansing process. I cleansed myself by smudging and praying so that I can do a good job about what I'm going to talk about. So I'm able to carry on in an understandable dialogue and pass it on to other people.

But this is just, really, just coming back, our culture is coming back, almost full force. At that time, [a *Piikani* spiritual leader, name omitted] would have sweats. People said, "Well, his sweats were Sioux!" But I needed something! I needed something spiritual that would satisfy my feelings of inadequacy and remove those from me. So I started going to the sweats. In the sweats, you're sitting there and it's intense praying. There's rocks in the middle and there's fire underneath. They're heating these rocks outside and then they're brought into this hole in the middle of the sweat lodge. They're brought into the sweat lodges and water is splashed on them and as they splash steam overcomes you. It can get really hot! In that sweat, you're praying for cleansing your body, mind, and soul, and you come out of there sometimes so weak. The first few times, it's really tough and as you start really feeling cleansed, then you start getting stronger, your strength starts coming, and you start becoming more sure of yourself, more confident. You

start to like yourself more because you feel cleansed, totally. Your mind's cleansed. Your spirituality's cleansed. Your body, you sweat out the impurities. That was my beginning of the return to being a spiritual person. I believe, as a young child, I was a very spiritual person, but as I went through my life it disappeared and almost totally vanished. So that was the beginning of my new life. I was able to start a new life, with the help of the sweats. I always highly recommend them to people. A lot of times, when people lose a child like we lost a grandchild that we raised. I remember my husband didn't sleep for three nights. It was so devastating and horrific for us. So, he would walk the streets. He'd get up at night and walk the streets because this child was so important to us, the very core of our life. It was devastating for him. I started going to sweats. You know, that helps me, spiritually, and a lot of people that lost children, go through so much and my advice to them was start at a sweat. You'll get spiritual help by praying for help. And it's intense praying because everybody is praying. You're not asking God to listen to you. You're conversing with God or the Creator. It's an amazing thing that our ancestors brought to us. We almost lost that!

School leaders often turn to alcohol, drugs, or other coping mechanisms to overcome challenges or fill a void in their lives according to *Noonaki*. These behaviors have the tendency to create imbalances that can impact a school leader's performance or reputation with the community. Spirituality teaches that imbalance is a product of over indulgence, which *Noonaki* has seen can have a direct impact the lifestyle of a school leader and their ability to abide by their values, as she tells in this story:

We cannot hang onto the things that don't make our lives good, such as drug addiction and alcohol. I'm not against drinking. I like to have a drink. I like to have a glass of wine with my meals. But, you can't overindulge. You have to have a balance in life. And you have to find that balance by being connected to these things that are important to your life, your value system…If you're a spiritual person, you don't take from other people without their knowledge and their consent. So these things apparently, I don't want to make a personal judgement, but if they didn't encounter that in their lifetime it's going to be hard for them to adjust and connect. But, when your body and mind is clouded over with drugs and alcohol, these things kind of fade in the background and our social ills on our reservation here are tremendous, even scary at times… I think it's so amazing because a lot of people go into these different types of religious activities and come out totally reformed, especially those that are battling alcoholism and drug addiction. It's dedication, total dedication and really wanting to be a part of the ceremony and really wanting to change your lifestyle or whatever it is that's causing you to be dysfunctional.

The land is grounded to *Piikani* spirituality, both as it is expressed and experienced, according to *Noonaki*. School leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation spend a lot of time in the communities, on the road, and in the elements. This is a reminder to take time for themselves to reflect, pray, and think in spiritual solitude, as *Noonaki* explains in a story:

The travel never got to me. I enjoyed traveling our here. It gave me time to reflect on what I had to deal with on my way out and on my way home. It gave me a chance to unwind so that I didn't bring my work home with me and my job was less frustrating for me.

School leaders are not immune to being affected by what they encounter with students, teachers, staff members, parents, and the community. Difficult situations or occurrences being dealt with at the schools can cause mental and emotional strife for school leaders that, according to *Noonaki*, can impact their personal lives and relationships. A school leader's spiritual fitness is not always enough to withstand traumas associated with his or her role; therefore, they need to sometimes seek "cultural or professional guidance." As the primary person tasked with resolving issues within the school, *Noonaki* stressed and worried if she could lead a school, despite her commitment to herself to turn her emotions off as she left the school at the end of each day. School leaders need to remember that when they carry issues out of the school into the home; their family may not know how to support their needs when they are preoccupied with work matters, as described by *Noonaki* in this story:

> You have to be able to, when you walk out of the building here, leave what happens here, and not take it home with you!  You don't want all these things affecting your personal life.  And that's one of the most difficult things to do because administrators often bring everything home. They have to go over their daily incidents and complaints with them and the family is not very receptive. Then you often feel non-support from your family. When an administrator

encounters problems, my advice would be to seek help, seek counseling! You

know, one of my best friends was a school counselor and I have a lot of respect

for her, because I could go to her and talk to her about things… You have people

come into the college [or school] and they have their faces painted and they, for

protection and for help, spiritual help, or whatever it is they need, like their family

circumstances. I was finding out, a lot of our people could not satisfy their need

for some kind of spiritual help or assistance. But these people that were having

problems staying sober for example, started going back to our native religious

traditions. They just can't go join! They have to be cleansed of whatever it is that

is stopping their life from being joyful and successful. So they have to stay clean

the whole year before they could go through many things in our culture. A lot of

people that were alcoholics were told the same thing, "…you stay sober for a year

and you come back and see us, our religious leaders." Our religious leaders do not

sit there and tell you, okay, this is how we do this or this is how we do that. They

tell you, "You come live it! Join us and learn as we go along." You have to be

participants and it's not an easy journey. So, those that get real spiritual and learn

of our way of life, turn around and help other people.

One of the most devastating things that can happen in the life of a school leader is

losing a close family member or a student (both present and past) due to premature death.

*Noonaki* sees these situations as more common than not on the Blackfeet Indian

Reservation; therefore, it is important for a school leader to possess a high level of

perseverance as they will likely have to lead the school's response to the death of a

student or other member of the school community, as *Noonaki* describes in these two stories:

> And a lot of time, when people lose a child - we lost a grandchild that we raised. My husband didn't sleep for three nights; it was so devastating and horrific for us. And so, he would walk the streets. He'd get up at night and walk the streets. Because the child was so important to us. It's a very core of our life.
>
> With the death of [name omitted], my constant companion at the Browning Middle School, in my mind I thought that I could deal with his death. But it was so sad and so devastating. You become a part of your students and your students become a part of you!

## Ceremony

Ceremony for the *Piikani* is the outlet for seeking spiritual enlightenment and guidance. In ceremony, according to *Noonaki*, you ask, through prayer, for blessings for others, the community, individuals in need, show gratitude for accomplishments, as well as seek internal strength to circumvent difficult situations. School leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in their role, should seek the assistance from ceremony as a way to integrate themselves into the "life force and worldview of the community" according to *Noonaki*. Ceremonies tend to be inclusive to both Native and non-Natives, however forming relationships with community members who participate in ceremonies can help school leaders to learn their expectations, limitations, and the protocol associated with ceremonial life.

Most of the time when school leaders practice spirituality, it will not be in a ceremony. Rather as a causal link to the culture, spirituality should be exercised daily through smudge and prayer. *Noonaki* says that prayers are not only intended to correct problems, but also to accept and acknowledge when school leaders experience successes as well. School leaders, no matter how they practice spirituality, should understand its purpose when seeking spiritual assistance linked to their respective belief system as a complement to ensuring balance and stability in their leadership over his or her school:

> The spirituality in our culture is, you're talking from the heart. You're talking from your daily experience. You're being thankful for what you had accomplished, what you had obtained, what the day brought you! We're going to light for the smudge. The scent and the smoke takes our prayers up to the Creator. The smudge also cleanses and protects you from all harmful things that may come your way.

Prayers are not solely requests but a conversation with a higher power, which in the ceremonial format according to *Noonaki*, these connections are open to receiving blessings on behalf of an individual's family and/or community. School leaders even if they have their own distinct belief systems, should still be in a position to learn and engage in ceremony, as *Noonaki* relates ceremonies to a reflection of daily life and worldview of the *Piikani*. School leaders using ceremony as a tool for understanding community dynamics associated with spirituality, is an important step in spiritual fitness, as *Noonaki* explains in this story:

You're not asking God to listen to you. You're conversing with God or the
Creator. An amazing thing that our ancestors brought to us and we almost lost
was our spirituality. Spirituality is how we're all interconnected even if we believe
in other religions. We all have our rituals that we go through, but when you stop
and think about it, a lot of them, when you start studying, are very similar and
only a little different.

*Noonaki* believes that spirituality links people together and defines how their
interactions can result in positive outcomes. School leaders need to recognize that
spirituality, whether or not they see it this way, has a profound impact on their
relationships with students, other stakeholders, and the community. Daily affirmations
and visible shows of support toward students in the school and community settings,
results in a school leader's ability to be seen as part of the community's positive
attributes when interacting with students everyday:

Everything is spiritual what you do for a student!  If you listen to a student, it's
spirituality.  If you give him the time of day, that's spirituality.

*Noonaki's* spiritual connections through ceremony have helped her to align her own
personal beliefs with responsibility and acceptance to help when individuals are in need
of it. She stresses that school leaders may be invited to ceremonies by community
members or even spiritual leaders within the *Piikani* community; therefore, it is important
for them to participate when asked to attend. It is through ceremony that the culture and
language are leveraged to garner the processes that individuals and the community use to
seek spiritual help and guidance. Lastly, *Noonaki* says that it is important to note that

ceremonial processes provide insight into how school leaders can see the possibilities for

the integration of *Piikani* culture and language into a school setting, as ceremonial

processes are directly tied to learning. *Noonaki* describes this in a story:

> The Holy Smoke, it's a long, long ceremony where they smoked the pipes and
>
> passed them around, while intensely praying for everybody that's there, for their
>
> families, and for the communities. It's really beneficial if you know what's being
>
> prayed, what's being said, and the significance of all of the spiritual leaders being
>
> in one place…You know, these people are very generous. Generosity is a big part
>
> of our culture and our heritage. The man that was performing the ceremony was
>
> so generous with his time, his knowledge and his songs, so patient… It was
>
> amazing, I was sitting there watching all evening and I saw three little boys that
>
> were sitting there on the floor. How quiet and respectful they were. They weren't
>
> running, yelling, or jumping around. In Maslow's book, he had talked about kids
>
> at *Siksika* having no discipline problems. I thought of that last night as we were
>
> watching and I was sitting there, going through and waiting for the ceremony to
>
> begin and the ceremony to continue and how well behaved those little kids were,
>
> and it was tiring and it was hard sitting there and those little kids sat there the
>
> whole night. They took turns falling asleep, but then they'd wake up and they'd
>
> get involved in what was going on and one little guy was getting kind of bored
>
> and wanted to play around, but his dad moved him next to him. He settled right
>
> down and there was no exchange, no yelling, or saying, "I don't want to!" That
>
> amazed me, that respect, because I haven't seen that in a lot of our community

events…Last night's ceremony, we were spectators there. Because it was

something different that I witnessed last night and a lot of times we don't know

the significance of what was going on.  And our elders told me years ago, if you

want to learn about our religion and our rituals, you need to come and join and be

a participant.  So, last night was a start, as being a participant. And we did a lot of

observing last night, just being respectful and quiet, but they really do want you to

feel important that you be an active participant. The elders will not tell you this is

what goes on in the Horn Society during a Sun Dance. This is what goes on in the

women's society, the *Motokiks*. If you want to know, you have to join…Each one

[song] he sang a song for each one of the people that got their faces painted. The

face painting is for protection, to protect you from outside forces that may harm

you in whatever way possible, that is not good for you. Each person that wanted

to get their face painted last night was given the courtesy and the respect and the

generosity of this man that was performing the face painting.  I was telling my

husband this morning, I said, "He had to be extremely tired!" That was at least

two hours of continuously praying and singing and he blessed the food and that

was a lengthy prayer. They pray for everybody, everything, even the animals,

even the Mother Earth.  They don't leave anything out, anything that is alive, they

pray for, because they're part of our creation. I just sitting there, thinking, I bet

he's not going to be able to talk tomorrow! But this was their third night of

performing and having their Holy Smoke… Each one of those people sitting up in

front had a night where they had their Holy Smoke and they invite different

people, family members, and community members.  I was fortunate, [name omitted] had invited me to the opening of his bundle last Spring at the first sound of thunder and I had all intentions to go and then my husband was sick, so I couldn't make it out there. I apologized to him and I felt really bad because, when he texted me and asked me to go to this Holy Smoke, I couldn't turn him down. I had to be generous with my time, because his invitation was extremely generous…I could not turn him down. This was my time that I donated to his ceremony, my generosity to him.

*Waattosin* or "living good" is at the epicenter of the *Piikani* values, connecting school leaders into practices that guide their interactions with the school, its stakeholders, and the *Piikani* community, through spirituality. School leaders, according to *Noonaki*, find that spirituality is linked to their individual fitness to perform the job and be seen by the community as invested in the education of the future generations of the community. Spirituality is also how school leaders can support themselves in encountering difficult and sometimes impossible situations out of the school leader's control. *Piikani* ceremonies are designed to grant clarity and strength, especially to people entrusted with large responsibilities such as leading a school. Knowing oneself spiritually and understanding how it can be used by school leaders also takes *Matsisskii* or "strength and bravery," as well as their willingness to face challenges as an *Iiyiikittahpii* or "fearless person." These concepts are linked to the *Piikani* value of courage.

CHAPTER NINE: *MAT-SIS-SKII* [COURAGE] "STRENGTH OR BRAVERY"

OR *II-YII-KIT-TAH-PII* "FEARLESS PERSON"

*Noonaki's* next stories about school leadership are reminiscent of chiefs, warriors, and others who had to show unrelenting adherence to the *Piikani* concept of courage, which she describes in her own words as:

In our history, we had to be - our men folk had to be - courageous, in order to go out and run the buffalo, in order to overcome a lot of dangers that they encountered. The *Piikani* word for courageous is *matsisskii* or *iiyiikittahpii*, strength or bravery. My ancestors in my family used to tell me I was a *matsisskii*. I wasn't a bad kid! I was a courageous kid... I was always doing something, you know, that other kids wouldn't do it. It's interesting how it's come back to me after all these years. It takes courage. If one person walks a path alone, that person is courageous. But if you have a person that's following all these other people in the wrong path, that's not courageous. You have to have somebody. You have to believe in what you think is right and what you think is important in your life. I got talked into this and it's been a learning experience; it's been a wonderful experience because of me being courageous. It goes back to our ancestors. You could not be a coward. You could not be afraid of venturing out and trying new things. Some things are going to be failures. Some things are going to be successful. Some things are going to be good for you. Some things are not going

to be good for you. But you're never going to know, unless you have the courage to step out and find out if it's the right thing.

## Self-Efficacy

Courage comes from knowing yourself, being aware of your own abilities, and having the confidence to accept challenges, such as being a school leader on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. *Noonaki* and other school leaders demonstrate a high level of self-efficacy, which enables them to possess the resilience needed to face challenges directly, and to emerge humbled and smarter because of it.

*Noonaki* explains that no person ever goes out and accepts a challenge with the expectation that he or she will not be successful. When every effort and other measure being taken is equal to what is needed to succeed, and still without success; *Noonaki* emphasizes that the important thing is that a school leader knows that they still tried their best and will continue to work toward the successful completion of his or her goal in the future. Learning each time what can be done to make personal improvements to enact changes needed increases the likelihood of success. That is the key to being courageous, according to *Noonaki*. School leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation are no exception to failure; many of the individuals who assume these roles are underprepared, inexperienced, and are subject to a sizable learning curve especially if they are pursuing graduate study while simultaneously working full-time, as *Noonaki* did. Preparation is not always a luxury that school leaders have when assuming critical leadership roles; therefore, the weight of this responsibility requires that they inspire others around them

and embrace ideas that are focused on student success. *Noonaki* expands upon this in these two stories:

> I was the Native American Studies coordinator and then I was the Special Education director, all because they didn't have people to fill these positions. I'm not the smartest person that there is in the world. I struggle with a lot of things, but I have the determination, I have the resiliency, and, I guess, courage. My Indian name when I was a little kid was *matsisskii*, that means courageous. You get challenged and you go for it. You don't sit back afraid. You go in and knowing there's going to be consequences and there's going to be a tough road to travel on sometimes. The path that we decide to take in life, can lead us through some thick forests and some paved paths. We have to, if things are not working out and we're on the wrong path, turn around, go back, and find out which is the right path to start over again. Again, it may not be the right one. You may have to do it two or three times.

> Are we going to be successful? Oftentimes, when we're unsuccessful in our endeavors, it's because we're not prepared. We're not prepared and we have to be prepared! Our educator's job is enormous. It's a very, very big responsibility. A very serious responsibility. Overwhelming, too. You have to be prepared! You have to be courageous to stand up for what you believe in.

Working in a school system that was designed not to accommodate the *Piikani* culture and language, for *Noonaki*, took courage to persevere. School leader reverence for the *Piikani* culture and language is often done as a labor of love, without much guidance

and support for its implementation. *Noonaki* points to the home structures on the

Blackfeet Indian Reservation, adopting traits from the dominant society which did not

allow for cultural elements to flourish; therefore, the responsibility to transmit culture and

language to future generations converted to the educational systems. School has fast

become the place where most students can be exposed to *Piikani* culture and language in

meaningful ways, and according to *Noonaki*, this is where students begin to form

connections between culture, their value systems, and the educational process. School

leaders should foster greater awareness for how the school's teachers and staff members

can help students gain self-efficacy and confidence. *Noonaki* emphasizes that, through

cultural efforts and experiences of the school, they instill pride in the students and shape

their identity:

> Why I was so persistent in helping develop the curriculum to maintain our
>
> language and our culture? It's very enjoyable! It's not a task that the students get
>
> tired of or dislike. They are so proud of themselves when they accomplish
>
> something. If they learn a new word, that's the first thing they would tell me.
>
> There was so much pride in that and I guess that's one of the reasons that I stayed
>
> on as the bilingual director.

*Noonaki,* as a school leader, regularly dealt with a lack of teacher and/or staff

member buy-in to her ideas related to school improvement, as well as *Piikani* culture and

language integration. She notes that this is to be expected if teachers and staff members

are not prepared for a "new things." This is quite often the main reason for resistance,

especially if teachers and staff members do not clearly understand the expectations. As

expected, these behaviors will pose certain challenges, however, as *Noonaki* stresses, this notion should be at the back of a school leader's mind when presenting new ideas, as he or she can over think situations and become discouraged. *Noonaki* suggests allowing others within the school to be courageous, by stepping back to allow teachers and staff members an opportunity to be vocal, candid, and contributing factors in problem solving. *Noonaki* says, "Do not create other problems because they do not accept your ideas," as she relates in these two stories:

> I had no training to be a principal, I was hired because they figured I was a strong courageous person…People being afraid to try out new things! So, you encounter a lot of things as an administrator that you have to learn to live with, I guess, overlook. It doesn't do you any good to make an issue of some things. I guess you choose the hill where you want to die!

> The courage to stand there and talk about the change and to recruit people. It takes courage to go up and ask a staff member or a student, "Would you support me?" The courage to stand up as a leader. Sometimes, you're alone as a leader. You're standing there and you're a target. You're opening yourself up for bows and arrows to aim at you. You're going to get shot many times.

Courage is accepting that, according to *Noonaki*, no school leader can be effective or have a positive impact on the lives of students without others. The challenge of a school leader is in deciding which way they will lead their teachers, staff members, parents, and the community to enable the school to best support student academic and social growth. *Noonaki* warns that school leaders are not in their positions to be self-

serving or unaccommodating to stakeholder's needs; therefore, it is imperative that the

school leader's guidance be supportive and reflective when rising to the expectations of

their constituencies, as *Noonaki* shares in these two stories:

> If one person walks a path alone that person is courageous, but if you have a
>
> person that's following all these other people in the wrong path, that's not
>
> courageous! You have to have somebody! You have to believe in what you think
>
> is right and what you think is important in your life. I got talked into this and it's
>
> been a learning experience and it's been a wonderful experience because of me
>
> being courageous.
>
> Along with one of our staff members, we run into some obstacles trying to
>
> implement all of this [culture and language] into our school system. One of the
>
> things that was really hard for us to deal with was the different dialects. We'd
>
> have people say, "Oh, that's not the way we say this.  That's not the way we say
>
> this word and that word." To me, it was just a way of tearing things down. My
>
> answer to that was, "We understand you. We know that you say coffee a little bit
>
> different. You say tea a little bit different or potatoes or whatever it is that you are
>
> talking about.  We know you say it different, but we understand each other. We
>
> know what it means. That's the important thing." One of the teachers at the high
>
> school and he's still there to this day, he took all the languages from the four tribes
>
> and wrote them out. There's a little bit of difference here; this is the way the
>
> Bloods said it, this is the way the *Siksika* says it, the *Aaskapiipukini*, the Piegan

here and the Northern Piegan, [Blackfeet] and so on. Then that eliminated the

argument, that obstacle that we encountered.

<u>Bravery</u>

Courage is knowing the consequences, but still being able to follow through.

*Noonaki* expresses that this is made possible by setting personal fears and doubts aside to

focus on accomplishing what needs to be done. School leaders, as *Noonaki* can attest, at

times need to exercise unrelenting courage when it comes to standing up to the status quo

in order to garner a better deal for the students, teachers, staff members, parents, and the

community.

School leaders are often handed responsibilities that they have to correct or re-

organize due to what was done or not done by prior administrations in implementing

school requirements, according to *Noonaki*. The efforts that school leaders, like *Noonaki*,

put into initiatives or curriculum are often not acknowledged, as they sometimes lack

further implementation or have all together been forgotten. *Noonaki* urges school leaders

to be diligent in maintaining school-based efforts, commit to allocating the resources, and

ensuring that what was spent continues to sustain successful efforts. *Noonaki* had to be

brave in managing all within the school in support of any effort; therefore, school leaders

did not intentionally waste school resources or place limitations on teachers or staff

members to do their jobs, as *Noonaki* describes in these two stories:

I go back to my home territory, where they still speak the language and we still

have people that think it's very, very important. Today, they have the total

immersion classes in the school system. It's not separate, it's not an elective, it's a part of it, the integrated curriculum and I always maintain here that was the way to do it. Not separate the language and culture in separate classes. I wanted to get it infused right into the curriculum, but the argument I always got was, "It's too much work!  How are we going to do it? We don't talk the language. We don't know the culture". Then, learn, was my stand!"

When I started being a bilingual director and that cart was taking off with me! I was all by myself trying to hold that cart back. I had to be courageous to stop that cart and be able to put things together in order. I was responsible for bringing *Piikani* material into the school system. The development of our *Piikani* curriculum and infusing it into the core curriculum, it failed! I was so disappointed when I came here [school administration] ... I asked, "Where is that curriculum we worked on? What happened to it?" Nobody knew! They said, "Oh, it's probably downstairs in the basement, stored away." I replied, "Well, that was not the purpose of it!" The purpose of it was to get it out into the school system, into our communities, so people could learn who they were and have that sense of pride in their history. I was so upset, but like I said, I was one person and I really believed that this would change our lifestyles on the reservations. Today, you see a lot more people taking this pride in being who they are. Somebody just put it away, put it in a drawer, and locked it up! It was very, very discouraging to me. It seemed like I was in a losing battle to implement Indian Education for All.

*Noonaki* recalls that school efforts to integrate the *Piikani* culture and language have always been marred by conflict within the community. Differences in how is it to be taught, who can teach it, and how will it fit into the school's curriculum and functions, were always questions *Noonaki* was asked. *Noonaki* even was asked if *Piikani* culture and language should even be included in the school's curriculum at all, to which she always responded, "Of course!" On the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, the *Piikani* culture and language is being taught at all levels, by community-based professionals that are certified (Class 7 certification, Montana Office of Public Instruction) to teach it. *Noonaki* credits these requirements to enhancing the school's curriculum, as it has become more open to the idea of its cross-curricular integration and a great number of best practices in education support school efforts implementing the *Piikani* culture and language. *Noonaki* challenges school leaders to recognize that they no longer have to look for the rationale, or at the pros and cons of integrating the *Piikani* culture and language; rather, they need to acknowledge it as an emergently promising movement within the school and the community. In a community that is inherently racially and religiously divided, *Noonaki* found it is safe to assume that some opinions or conflicts are inevitable, if not necessary, to begin community-based dialogue to plan for and resolve concerns. This was especially true about issues surrounding students' rights to make choices about their education, as *Noonaki* tells in this story:

> The other thing we encountered, I talked about, years ago, was the religious
>
> influence on our people. When I was bilingual director, I had a couple come in
>
> and they wanted to have our lesson plans, they wanted to have our songs,

everything, copies of our books, and I really didn't know what they were up to. I gave them, I figured they wanted to learn some, here they were from a religious group that was opposed to reviving our culture. They didn't believe the old ways and they were indoctrinated to believe that it's the devil worship. They didn't think our culture or our language was important. They were so acculturated to the Christian religion, and it caused quite a controversy amongst our people in town. Half of the town was for the religious groups and the other half was for reviving our culture. We had big meetings and it turned into a lot of shouting matches and people being defiant and actually kind of threatening. I was turned into the feds as teaching religion, Indian religion in the schools. I was turned into the state and leaders in the state. I was just totally blind-sided by this couple, because if they wanted to know more about our culture, they could have come and sat down and I'd have explained everything that was going on. It all stemmed from one gentleman in the Napi Elementary School, reading the Blackfeet creation legend. But, the argument from the culturally oriented people was, well, you have Peter Pan that flies around in your classrooms, what's wrong with that legend. The legend was a story.  It was really a controversy. I just got really verbally and personally attacked over it. I just thought, "Oh my god, I'm always getting myself into tough situations. How am I going to get out of this?" I felt very, very alone.  I felt like the support wasn't there from our school administrators. They got some funding and they needed, they wanted the money for the district.  They wanted to spend the money, but they didn't buy into it totally, as far as I'm concerned. But

they wanted somebody to carry the load, somebody to lead the way, pave the way, and I happened to be the one. So, my challenge was enormous and I jumped on the bandwagon and I got drug through mud, slander, harassment, and verbal abuse. This couple, to this day, still tried to harm me in some way, personally. It got to be a real personal thing with them… They [disgruntled parents and community members] turned me into the feds! They turned me into the state! They said I was teaching religion in the schools and they didn't approve it! They were crucifying me on the cross, literally! And it was quite an emotional, stressful incident I went through. It divided the community right in half. Half was Christian, the other half that still wanted to bring back our traditional culture, language, and religion. Then you talk about courage. It takes a person with courage to go out into the community and bring something back that was pushed aside by Christianity. The people were told it was not a lifestyle that was good.

*Noonaki* recommends that school leaders not expect teachers and staff members to make changes that they would not reasonably do themselves. Shifting the thinking of school's stakeholders takes time and the long-term accumulation of evidence that strongly recommends their support of whatever it may be. *Noonaki* witnessed the tendency of school leaders to immediately appease and support the view of a respective stakeholder(s). However, school leaders must know that they're not supposed to make everyone happy, but as *Noonaki* positioned herself, she weighed the influences, the availability of school resources, and targeted specific student needs to make any decision. Even though it may not be what one or more stakeholder group wanted. As stakeholders

become more involved in school matters, *Noonaki* reminds school leaders that it is

important for them to be responsive and focused in expressing to others the realities and

complexities of decisions they are entrusted to make:

> How are we going to change people's thinking to get them to turn back to our
>
> value system and to turn back to a good life? It's really a heavy task. It seems to
>
> me that the more people you have involved, the more staff members, students, and
>
> parents, the more complicated education becomes. There was no political
>
> influence in a lot of the decisions we made. Nowadays, there's so much political
>
> influence in our school systems.

*Noonaki* recalls that many school leaders, as they assumed their role, were often

from the outside (of the school or the community), and did not have enough experience to

allow them to seamlessly navigate the school without others taking notice. *Noonaki* says,

"some days you will be their savior and on others, pure evil in the eyes of the teachers

and staff members," as it is natural to assume that some people may need a while to come

around to a new school leader's style, which he or she is still likely developing his or

herself. As a school leader, *Noonaki* was expected to resolve issues between stakeholders;

therefore, it was critical for her to be called to situations to objectively see and assess for

the stakeholders whether or not a particular concern is rational and/or relevant to them

working together to support student needs. *Noonaki* describes this expectation in these

two stories:

> But it's amazing what you deal with, when you have people that's been in an
>
> institution too long and they don't like the intrusion. I came from the outside! I

was not in one of their in-groups. I was not in the educational system all those

years and I didn't go up the grades with them or take the steps in our educational

experience, so they thought I wasn't qualified. I really wasn't qualified but I was

put in this position because they couldn't find anybody else to take it. Nobody had

the courage to take this position! I always think, "Holy moly, I must have been

really stupid to step into this," because we had conflicts between parents and

teachers and I had to be the referee! I had to step in and stop a lot before it got out

of hand, before the controversy got unmanageable!

These are some unique situations that, as school leaders, we have to deal with and

we have to deal with appropriately. Even though you don't want to administer

consequences, in some cases you have to… Sometimes, you just have to use

common sense. This one teacher, she decided to use physical force and drag him

[a student] down the hallway. His shirt was above his chest and he got skinned up

in the process. The parents were looking at a lawsuit against the school district

over that incident. So, we had to terminate her and of course, the state lawyer was

involved in it.  So, it gets really complicated when you run into situations like

this.

*Noonaki* advises school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation to always be aware

of their own safety. Maintaining personal safety is a lesson *Noonaki* learned the hard

way, as she did not develop a response to a harmful situation, as she expresses in this

story:

Verbally and sometimes it may end up being physically, so you have to learn to

protect yourself.  Like the incident that happened at the Browning Middle School

when I got a chunk of my hair pulled out. I didn't have sense enough to protect

myself or keep myself safe. I didn't think I needed that. I didn't think I was ever

going to run into a hostile student that had the capability of doing that. But I

talked to a former, now since passed, superintendent [name omitted] and he told

me one of the first things that ever happened to him as a principal. He didn't get

behind his desk when he was confronting a student about an issue and the student

kicked him where it hurts the most. He said "I sure learned to stay behind the

desk."  That's another thing, as educators we never think of, is protecting

ourselves. I just didn't think anyone was ever going to harm me or hurt me and he

didn't either. He said "Boy, I'll never forget that," that was a lesson in life that as

an adult he never forgot.

*Noonaki* calls school leadership a perpetual "juggling act," as school leader

interactions and experiences will lead them to react in ways that begin to reflect their

professional knowledge and integrity. Although school leaders act within the confines of

their position and the laws, *Noonaki* reminds them that one decision can create a string of

reactions that point the blame at them directly. *Noonaki* stresses that school leader

knowledge and awareness is essential in taking a stand as challenges to her leadership,

become more complicated, sometimes dangerous, and can be sustained for long periods

of time away from school leadership duties, as expressed by *Noonaki* in this story:

Later on, as the years went by and I was the special education director, we had

[name omitted] from the Glacier County Attorney's Office who wanted to bring a

*Piikani* student up from Cut Bank. They didn't want him up in Cut Bank.  They

wanted us to deal with him and the high school didn't want him. They refused

him! But you can't refuse a special education kid.  The law says you cannot. They

said, "We didn't have room. We don't have no place to put him. We don't have

anybody to be with him for the safety of the other kids!" Then, the Stay In School

[alternative program] said, "We don't have room!" So, here I had this kid, and I

thought to myself, "What am I going to do with this guy?" He had threatened his

probation officer, who was a female. He told her he was going to rape and kill

her! This is what [name omitted] put into my lap. I thought, "*Oh my gosh, here we*

*go again*!" We got a personal tutor for him who had a degree in sociology and

criminal justice; therefore, she had worked with the juvenile department for years.

So, we contracted her to come in and work with him. I had to recommend her, but

one of the school board members wanted us to not for rehire her. She [the school

board member] wanted another gentleman hired as the tutor for this kid. I said we

couldn't hire him! She made a big issue of it in front of the school board meeting,

and I couldn't go into detail as to why I wouldn't hire him to be a tutor for this kid.

That was brought in and so they had to close the board meeting in order to discuss

why we couldn't hire this person at the school. It was one of her [school board

member] distant relatives. So, these are the things that we play, the political game.

The politics that come into school administration is never ending! You have to be

courageous and able to stand up when you're being challenged by other people, stand your ground! Think what is in the best interest of that student! I knew if this gentleman was hired to tutor this kid, he'd end up beating him up! He was a hot-headed man and this kid was unruly, he was a disrespectful, macho-type guy and he was known to be into drugs. It was not a good teacher-student combination! The school board member couldn't see that, because she was a new school board member and she didn't bother to check with me. I said, "Why didn't you come and ask me? Why didn't you come see me?" She said, "I don't have to do that. I make my decisions in this board room, here!" I responded, "Well, there's some things you cannot discuss in a board room, because you'll get slapped with a lawsuit."

## Sacrifice

Being courageous to *Noonaki*, meant that she, the teachers, and staff members were being called upon to make sacrifices, both personally and professionally. School leaders need to acknowledge the sacrifices that teachers and staff members make on behalf of the students, parents, and the community members they serve as part of the school. *Noonaki* by virtue of her school leadership role, sacrificed all she could to support and continue successful efforts within her school, which sometime meant her not being able to commit to her own professional, personal, or family obligations.

The largest sacrifice that a school leader, teacher, or staff member can make is to call the Blackfeet Indian Reservation home, according to *Noonaki*. Geographically remote, isolated, and at times hazardous, individuals and their families have to really want to live

in the community, as their job may not be enough to stay for an extended amount of time. *Noonaki* emphasizes that, living on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation and within its respective communities, also involves being committed outside of their position at the school. *Noonaki* did this by volunteering in the community and socializing with the local people and their children. *Noonaki* believes that students and parents especially, are sensitive to school leaders who do not make any efforts to integrate themselves fully into the community, because it is difficult to interact with or even trust someone who does not seem to be invested in student and community success. If a school leader only accepts the position and not the community, as *Noonaki* witnessed, his or her time and level of investment in the students' will be short lived:

> Those teachers that stayed [lived in the community] here, left their mark here in the community and on the students. It told them students, it gave them a sense of, "Hey, this person cares about me. This person cares about our community. They want to live here."
>
> I became the assistant principal here [Browning Middle School] to a gentleman, a very nice man, [name omitted]. But he was new to the community and oftentimes, I think this place scared him, because he was gone a lot! I was left here to handle it! The commotion that went on here!

As the world of a school leader is at times contentious, *Noonaki* feels that it is important that school leaders are ready and able to accept any challenge that is directed toward them. School leaders will be tasked with supporting teachers and staff members, as they learn how to do new and innovative things to improve. When teachers and staff

members are resistant or unsuccessful, they sometimes want revenge or recourse for hardships endured. *Noonaki* came to expect that when she supported teachers and staff members to the extent she could, she may have never been fully appreciated, especially if stakeholders are not receptive to correct actions taken. Teachers and staff members have to invest themselves to correct actions or failures, as *Noonaki* candidly expresses, and it is likely that she was going to encounter some resentment or a reaction that may lead to them losing stakeholder rapport or support. *Noonaki* this describes in these two stories:

> You could not be a coward. You could not be afraid of venturing out and trying new things. Some things are going to be failures and some things are going to be successful. Some things are going to be good for you and some things are not going to be good for you. But you're never going to know, unless you have the courage to step out and find out if it's the right thing!

> At this time, I don't like this place [Browning Middle School] very much. I don't like some of the people very much. And here come the superintendent and the assistant superintendent, they had a cake for me, a farewell cake. Nobody was invited. At other farewell functions people were invited and I thought, "Ho! What's going on here? I didn't want a cake. I didn't want a farewell party. Why didn't you consult me?" Of course, I was just their puppet again. They said, "Oh, if you ever decide you want to come back, you're welcome to come back and work in the district, but I think we'll put you out to Babb." I said, "Well, I know a lot of people in Babb and I wouldn't really mind working there either." I said, "Thank you for the offer," and I said "Thank you for the cake." For a long time, it

left a sore spot on me and I would think about today, and I still think about it and ask myself, "Was I set up? Was I set up for all this turmoil?" For all this being a scapegoat and when we talk about being courageous, I had to be really courageous to put myself through all this. But, today, it's well worth it.

*Noonaki* believes that school leaders cannot position themselves as being complacent or accepting to everything that is placed on the school. Some directives or requirements are made with little or no resources or follow through, or even a firm understanding of how these decisions impact the students and their learning environment. *Noonaki* was witness to school leaders who were unreasonable or dictatorially demanding, which explains their inability to implement changes that affect teachers, staff members, and students. When it becomes highly apparent that school leaders need to bring challenges they are faced with to the table, teachers, staff members, and other stakeholders can help make decisions about curriculum, school functions, and other school matters. *Noonaki* routinely had to have the courage to defend against ill-informed or conceived mandates that could jeopardize her ability to manage the school, and gain active support from teachers, staff members, and students:

> Oftentimes, we're not active participants! We're just people that look on and watch. One of the superintendents wanted the high school students to be at their desks for seventy-five percent of the school hours. I totally disagreed with him and I argued with him! That is not our way of learning. How can you learn when you sit there for that long and your mind wanders off because you're tired from sitting? Students need to move around! They need to be active participants in

advocating for our students. I had to have the courage to stand up to him and express my opinion on the issue.

The ultimate sacrifice many school leaders make is staying in one school for an extended period of time, which even *Noonaki* struggled with as she considered the challenges she faced over the course of their tenure. School leaders will find themselves doubting their abilities or investment in their school from time to time. *Noonaki* calls these "natural reactions" to instances that are seemingly debilitating and/or insurmountable; however, school leaders need to recognize that sacrificing themselves for the betterment of their school may result in them succeeding or not succeeding professionally. *Noonaki* calls the most challenging experiences the most instrumental in a school leader developing their own style of leadership and requisite skills they need to persevere in systems where demands on them can be unnaturally high and sometimes unreasonable. Without the "sacrifice of Native educators," *Noonaki* says, very little progress could have been made to emphasize the value of *Piikani* culture and language in education. As *Noonaki* recalls in these two stories:

> After two weeks in here [Browning Middle School], I wondered, "What on earth am I doing here? Lord, how did I get in this mess?" But, I wouldn't quit! I'm not a quitter! I thought, "Well, I'll ride it out!" It turned out to be the best education I had in my whole years of schooling and my life experience. I learned so much about the students and so much about human behavior that it was really rewarding for me. It was a tough year! I went through a lot in this place!

Something that kind of helped me decide, was that I was lonesome for our

traditional ways. I was lonesome for the way my grandparents lived. I'd hear

Indian songs and I'd get really lonely and depressed, I wasn't even really sure why

until later on, in life. I realized that it was my identity. I didn't know who I was. I

got into this program as the director and it was a real challenge; it was a tough

journey, as I said before, "It was not an easy task and to be Indian was just not

cool. We were all kind of acculturated.  The Indian culture wasn't, the language

and everything, wasn't cool.  A lot of people didn't speak the language anymore

because it was forbidden, but it was cool to be white, you know. You spoke

English. And some of us that come off these reservations spoke broken English.

And some of my family is still like that and people made fun of them. But, then

there was a few educators, local educators here, that started reviving the culture

and stories about our legends and so forth.  They were very careful to come in

with the legends and so forth, little children's stories they wrote.  And they started

kind of reviving the Indian culture. They started reviving us as Indian people. It

was a way of defining our identity.

*Noonaki's* bold courage or *matsisskii* or "strength and bravery," helped her to

become more *iiyiikittahpii* or a "fearless person," when she accepted school leadership

positions on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. *Noonaki* was able to unleash her self-

efficacy to survive and persevere in school leadership positions, where she confidently

led teachers, staff members, and other stakeholders to focus on what is best for the

students, even if it was challenging for them to do so. *Noonaki* through her bravery and

her personal and professional sacrifices, was able to break through a substantial amount

of resistance surrounding the integration of *Piikani* culture and language, yet was able to

still elicit teachers and staff members' confidence in her leadership as she shielded them

from unnatural requirements. *Noonaki* was able to solidfy her adherence to

*Maanistapaisspipii* or humility, as she was always aware of how her own behavior

reflected her actions. *Noonaki* stresses that to the *Piikani*, "how they [school leader] are

or their behavior" is perceived can have an impact on a school leader's image in the

school and the community they serve.

CHAPTER TEN: *MAA-NIS-TAPAI-SS-PI-PII*

[HUMILITY] OR "HOW YOU ARE"

*Noonaki's* next stories about school leadership focus on how we are as people, especially how we treat, interact, and support one another as part of the *Piikani* concept of humility. Positioning ourselves around the "circle" was intended to help the *Piikani* accomplish goals that were mutually beneficial for the entire tribe. *Noonaki* describes this in her own words:

> Humility. It's more like a behavior. *Maanistapaisspipii*. You have to be a humble person in order to feel other people's pain or sympathetic to them. If you don't have that, then you could be a real self-centered person! In our culture, we all work and help each other. If we see somebody in distress, we go over and we assist them and you're humble.

*Noonaki* recalls the story of *Kaiani* Chief Red Crow, which she heard as a child and provides insight into an exemplary person who served his people as an example of humility, while assuming leadership over an entire tribe. With every good example of humility come ill-conceived or selfish actions from others that could shake the integrity of a leader's ability to keep his or her people united which was essential to their survival. *Noonaki* recollects the story of Chief Red Crow and his rival brother, to provide an example of humility and describe what it is not:

> Reminds me of Chief Red Crow. At the time he was made chief, he was a very kind and humble man. His clan [or band] was all very respectful of him. He had a

brother named Back Fat, I believe it was. He wasn't happy, he wanted to be chief!

So they told him, "Okay, we'll split the clan! Those that want to stay with Red

Crow, stay here. Those that want to go to with Back Fat, can go." The people that

weren't satisfied with the way his clan [or band] was, left with Back Fat. That's

how they chose their chief. And so, because he was a humble man, he was good

to the people and he led the people. He was a smart man and what you might say

in today's words, ambitious. He wanted to be the leader. So they gave him the

clan [or band], they give him the opportunity to lead.

*Noonaki* credits her reconnecting with her culture and language as being the most

important and formative period of her career as a school leader, which she describes as:

Getting involved earlier with our culture, bringing that into the school system and

being able to teach our language and practice our traditional lifestyle, changed me

a lot! When you're an authoritarian, there's no choice! These things are what I

learned as an adult.

### Humor

Humor is an ever-present component of daily *Piikani* life, whether through

learning processes, interactions with others, and/or being able to laugh or reflect about

ourselves. *Noonaki* relates humor as a quality associated with overcoming challenges,

both personally and professionally. *Noonaki* believes that community resilience and

healing from historical traumas is tied to the use of humor by individuals or their families

as a protective factor in maintaining optimism and general mental health. Community,

family, and individual use of humor, according to *Noonaki*, forms connections that embrace lived realities and at times satirically recognize personal faults.

*Noonaki* recognizes school leaders are individuals with their wants, needs, strengths, and insecurities that they carry with them as they are entrusted to assume leadership in schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. These qualities or attributes have to strike a significant balance, according to *Noonaki*, as school leaders have to possess abilities and mask their imperfections. School leaders are consistently at the forefront of responding to concerns shared about them and their school by the community. *Noonaki* recalls being placed in sometimes precarious situations that reflected her own lack of knowledge or strategies to counter challenges she continuously encountered. School leaders need to find humor in impossible situations, in order to do what *Noonaki* describes as identifying what she could have done differently and move on from challenges once they were resolved. *Noonaki* believes that people should not dwell on or "dig up old bones" for the sole premise of making themselves look like they are not at fault by passing the blame along onto others. School leaders require a thick and at times impenetrable skin, which according to *Noonaki*, is intended for them to not take offense when challenged or lose sight of their roles and responsibilities. Through humor, school leaders can break down walls in communication, ease school-community tensions without blaming or shaming individuals, and serve as a model for helping students learn resiliency as school leaders interact with others:

> You have to be comfortable in your skin. I often hear that and a lot of times, we
>
> forget about humor. Laughter is the best medicine there is in life, yet we are so

stressed out and so involved in trying to resolve things that we forget to be happy.

You have to be happy! You have to include humor! I can like myself. I can live

with myself. I can be alone with myself and not feel isolated and be threatened. I

think all of our students need to learn that, to be comfortable in their skin, to like

themselves.

Humor has been dissected out of learning environments by the strict

regimentation and implied competitive expectations historically on the Blackfeet Indian

Reservation. *Noonaki* asserts, humor is closely tied to *Piikani* notions of learning, ensures

the strength of relationships with others (especially throughout an individual's lifetime),

and has allowed for her to look at herself in ironically humorous ways. *Noonaki* used

humor as a school leader to reinforce her ability to continue on, as she tells in these three

stories:

> We lost that sense of humor, that sense of enjoyment. When we were kids we
>
> were always laughing, having a lot of fun, and we didn't fight. We were just
>
> happy to be amongst our friends, neighbors and relatives.
>
> You have to have a sense of humor in order to live through all the obstacles that
>
> you run across in this profession. It has so many rewards. And people need to just
>
> focus on the rewards.  Sometimes we get so hung up on little things. My personal
>
> saying was, "…never sweat the small stuff" and I didn't touch them. That was
>
> what I lived on."
>
> One of my former students is a U.S. Marshall now. She was one of the girls that
>
> stuck out in my mind because she had a contagious laughter. When she laughed,

you could hear it, and you could hear the happiness. Everyone enjoyed being around her because she had such a contagious laugh. So, we have to keep humor and laughter in our daily lives. We get so stressed out and so involved in all the negative things of our daily situations, we forget oftentimes to laugh and see humor… If you teach the students to laugh at themselves, then school is not so stressful!

*Noonaki* believes, as learners of the *Piikani* culture and language, that students, teachers, and staff members begin to use the *Piikani* language in formal and informal ways that imparts general usage in school curriculum and functions. The *Piikani* language also yields itself to being humorous in ways that *Noonaki* says, "cannot be said in English," as it actively humbles those who speak it to others, especially among students in a classroom setting:

Humor is a big part of our language. I love our language because when I sit down and converse with people in our *Piikani* language, you're always smiling! You're always laughing because it is humorous. Oftentimes, I would walk past old people years ago in front of the Buttrey Store here in Browning, sitting there visiting, nodding their heads, smiling, and giggling. Laughing! That is a part of our culture that's missing. We need to get that back into it to teach people to be happy. Enjoy humor! You don't have to be so serious! I can't say it enough times, our language is humorous and fun!

*Noonaki* believes that lack of humor in a learning setting can result in complications in relationships among students, teachers, staff members, and most notably

school leaders. "Humor allows for each person to relate and see each other as human," as struggles and deficiencies are common in all people. Without humor, other emotions such as anger can permeate responses and interactions between individuals within the school. *Noonaki* even encountered individuals who were likely reacting out of a place of stress or disappointment in themselves. Humor according to *Noonaki*, is an interaction between people that can heal learned helplessness by reinforcing personal resiliency despite challenges faced. Therefore, as a school leader, helping to eliminate feelings of inadequacy in others and addressing unresolved anger, are realities that cannot be ignored. *Noonaki* reinforces the notion that humor can promote a positive environment for an entire school. Therefore, *Noonaki* believes that humor sets the tone in encouraging the presence of *Piikani* culture and language in school activities and functions. *Noonaki* relays the importance of humor in these two stories:

> I went back to Canada years later and I was amazed at how many people were angry. The people that I grew up with! Then I got to thinking about it, I was one of them, too! I had forgotten how to be happy. I had forgotten how to be joyful. How to laugh. When we lose that, it becomes a pretty dull life.
>
> We need to keep humor and happiness at a forefront in our educational system! Our kids are not happy in the current educational setting, if there's no humor in it. In our life, we have got to be able to learn to laugh at ourselves and to accept their mistakes as a learning tool, rather than something so horrific that they can't face the world. We need to keep focused on that! Not to beat themselves to death over their mistakes and disappointments. There's times we want things and we try to

accomplish them, only we fail miserably at it. We cannot let those destroy us totally and make us failures. We have to learn to overcome!

Humor is contagious and an effective tool in helping students find meaning into what they are learning, as seen in an example of *Noonaki's* story of a recently passed Blackfoot elder and her teacher. Humor, whether reflecting good or bad, has its place in understanding how an education can inspire others to continue what was left behind despite the untimely passing of an elder with encyclopedic knowledge of Blackfoot culture and language. Humor is often a quality *Noonaki* sees in her own family members and friends, saying, "who we spend time and cherish life with, we are drawn to them and feel its power daily." For school leaders to act with great humility, is to enact humor in all sorts of interactions and situations that they encounter, as *Noonaki* describes in this story:

> One of the saddest things is that when we lost the great educational leader of our culture and language. Narcisse Blood passed away a few years ago in a car accident. It was so devastating! Even though I worked for him for many years, I was just sick about it to realize that we lost such a great man. Such a kind, loving man, with so much knowledge, and so much fun. He had a sense of humor that just didn't end! He always had everybody laughing, even in his presentations he always had to have a joke in there or something silly to make people feel comfortable, just to get a smile out of them and laugh.

Professional Growth

*Noonaki* sees school leadership as a process throughout her career, as she has endeavored to grow professionally and encouraged her students, as well as fellow teachers and staff members to do the same. School leaders need to consistently identify changes within themselves and monitor their responses related to their own practices, as *Noonaki* credits this to helping to her accomplish school goals in meeting achievement demands. School leaders are the catalyst for the development of their students, teachers, and staff members, but as *Noonaki* suggests, school leaders should also concurrently invest in their own knowledge and skills, to identify practices that could be shared and replicated. *Noonaki* also supported her school's students, teachers, and staff member's professional development, by encouraging them to develop better responses to student learning needs.

As a professionally trained school leader with an advanced degree, *Noonaki* asserts that it is likely that most of the community will see school leaders as different from everyone else on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. The school leader is a typically highly regarded position to hold as a professional in the *Piikani* community, and with that comes heightened expectations and other challenges that can reach far beyond his or her job performance. Students, teachers, staff members, parents, and even community members, will at times seek the help of a school leader, whether or not it even pertains to school matters. School leaders need to be confident in their ability to utilize their skills. However, as *Noonaki* recalls, some may receive notoriety for their accomplishments, but they should not project themselves doing everything at the expense of not giving credit to

students, teachers, staff members, parents, and community members who may have

contributed to the overall success of the school. *Noonaki* stresses to school leaders the

importance of being accepted or being well perceived by the school stakeholders;

therefore, it is not wise for them to be perceived as self-promoting as it may give others

in the school and community pause and could affect their ability to lead others, as

*Noonaki* expresses in these two stories:

> Humility is so important. You have to have humiliation in order to understand
>
> humility. And you have to understand that it hurts and sometimes the hurt is deep.
>
> When you think about being humiliated, you think, "I don't want anyone else to
>
> go through that!" But we don't all think alike. There's other people out there who
>
> deliberately will humiliate students, staff, or anybody that gets in their way,
>
> because they didn't know how to deal with humility of humiliation. That you have
>
> to learn and teach students. Some students get so shamed and then the shame
>
> turns to anger and frustration. So that [humor] is vital also in our value system…
>
> You can't practice humility if you don't know what it is to be humiliated at times
>
> and really feel it and realize that, "Hey, you're no better than anybody else. You're
>
> not above anybody. You're equal with them." When we pass that talking stick.
>
> We talk about our problems or successes and so forth. We all sit at the same level.
>
> Nobody's standing above you. You're all at the same level.  In our educational
>
> system, when we're going to provide in this tremendous task that's put before us,
>
> we need to be all at the same level, with your staff. I think at the beginning, when
>
> you first start in your school settings, your new positions, it's something that you

have to think of. The first thing that I need to do is be at the same level with the staff. I need to be at the same level with my students. I need to be able to sit and look at them in the eye and talk with them and make them feel just as important as I want to feel. A lot of times we don't let kids feel important. We get too involved in our work. We get too technical. We forget the human side of the job and I guess, I can't stress that enough.

If you're arrogant, you're not going to be accepted! There's some things you know, better left untouched and to walk away from, especially in our profession. We had people that can get very argumentative and be know-it-alls when there's no way but their way and nothing else can work except the way they want things done. Those kinds of things are some of the biggest obstacles we run across.

Being humbled after making a mistake or acting in an inappropriate manner is hard but according to *Noonaki*, is "a necessary pill for school leaders to swallow," once they failed or treated someone poorly in the community. Redemption on the part of the school leaders, as *Noonaki* emphasizes, requires the acceptance of his or her indiscretion, not making excuses for why something happened, and explaining what appropriate action should have been taken. *Noonaki* whole-heartedly believes that school leaders admitting to those who were affected by their mistake or actions, helps them to rebuild trust, however, she admits that it could be a long time before a relationship can be restored. Humility requires school leaders to not only accept their mistakes, but to move on from them and express what appropriate remedies will be needed to correct them. *Noonaki* emphasizes this in these three stories:

I came in like a bull, I guess is the word I would use, because I was non-tolerant of foul, profane language. I was intolerant of certain behaviors, but I soon learned that students will rebel against you when you do that. The other stuff didn't work! It just didn't work to be such a disciplinarian! What worked was the respect, generosity, spirituality, and the courage to change things. Humility means you're getting down to their level and you're giving them credibility for their knowledge. If you do something wrong, you have to pay the consequences and be humble. The humility that we encountered a lot of times and learned to live with, was a big asset. We all make mistakes and our mistakes are not all the same. So we have to learn to overcome our mistakes and not dwell on them. Correct what was wrong and move on from them!

We're not perfect people! I have lost my temper a few times. But we need to learn to go back and be humble and apologize for our actions. Because we cannot be perfect. There's no such thing as a perfect person.

*Noonaki* recognizes that the "fear of failure" can lead school leaders to not take on initiatives that could disrupt the status quo. The students and parents on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation cannot accept continuous failures due to complacency in school leadership and functions. According to *Noonaki*, failure for our schools "is not an option!" Being open to new advances helps maintain the school's relevant delivery of curriculum, as well as imparts to teachers and staff members that changes are inevitable. *Noonaki* set an example as a school leader, when she, the teachers, and staff members had to be able to agree on a shared vision for student success. These systems reflect

inclusiveness of teachers and the staff members, who will be responsible for enacting proposed changes; therefore, some will resist due to fear of failure. *Noonaki* reflects that, as a school leader, her support is critical in times of failure; therefore, any event should be leveraged as teachable moments for those involved, as *Noonaki* recalls:

> Everybody wants to be successful! Nobody wants to fail! I guess the main thing is we're so afraid of failure that a lot of times we don't get involved because we're afraid to try something new or to transform into something positive or rewarding, and break away from behaviors that are not! We just continuously have to change with the times, but if the change is rapid, people sometimes cannot accommodate those changes. They're stuck in their world, in the things that are comfortable and they don't reach out to the new adventures or new life experiences.

School leaders should walk through the doors of their school every day, as *Noonaki* did, with a positive attitude and a high level of optimistic energy to support and acknowledge students,' teachers,' and staff members' lived realities. For *Noonaki*, optimism has to be a part of education, so that when school leaders (or any stakeholder group) face failure, they become aware of the possibilities beyond learning from their own mistakes to not making the same mistake again. Students have to be encouraged by the actions of school leaders, teachers, staff members, parents, and community members to think that they can accomplish anything despite failures, to see failures as teachable moments, as *Noonaki* tells in these two stories:

I always tell those kids when things don't fall into place the way we want it, well,

maybe it wasn't meant to be. Maybe there was something there that wasn't good

for us. This is our native way of thinking!

If you fail, that means, just means you have to take the class over again. The

second time around can be more rewarding!

School leaders often find themselves in challenging yet rewarding circumstances,

as *Noonaki* has learned about while working on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

Investing themselves in a community can help school leaders grow professionally; this

occurs as their connection and bond to the school and community gets stronger according

to *Noonaki*. School stakeholder interactions both formally and informally outside of

school have to occur in ways that reflect community acceptance or norms; therefore, the

school leader is able to learn acceptance within the community itself, on the terms of the

community. *Noonaki* warns about school leader isolation from the community that is

primarily the result of their own actions; therefore, it is incumbent upon the school leader

to not act or interact in the community in ways that could jeopardize their professional

integrity and general community acceptance, as *Noonaki* expands on this in these two

stories:

We have to have a sense of place and a sense of belonging. Feeling like you're

belonging to a group, an organization, or a school environment is important! If

you feel like you're being honored or recognized as an individual is one of the

main positives in encouraging and leading with acceptance. It's a big issue in our

educational system.

With the middle school, it was really a tough position. When I left here, the teachers did not want me to move. They wanted me to stay because that was the first time the behavior was under control out here. Thirteen teachers quit when I left; they wanted me here because I could carry through and meet their expectations of a principal. It was not an easy task.

School leaders' experiences differ from one another as they progress and possess various leadership capacities throughout their career according to *Noonaki*. Some school experiences, likely the most challenging, stand out for school leaders. *Noonaki* expresses a keen understanding of how a school leadership experience can change the very perspective and practices of a school leader. She encourages other school leaders to assume roles with the mindset that they will learn and apply those lessons throughout their career and lifetime. Novice school leaders, according to *Noonaki, especially* should be cognizant of how their learning curve positively or negatively impacts students, teachers, and staff members as they dedicate themselves to be reflective of their own abilities and actions, as described by *Noonaki* in these two stories:

I came in as a very stern person and when I left the Browning Middle School, I was a different person. I was totally reformed! I came here as an assistant principal and I had no training to be an assistant principal. When I went into the middle school, I put in some tough years as an administrator because I was going through a learning process. That was all very, very different to me because the way I was raised and the environment I was educated in, I had to learn. I learned

on the job. With the assistance of the people that were here for a long time. When

you get into a leadership role here, your world expands tremendously!

With education, I feel like it's a learning process. You've gone through school.

You've gone through all these studies to be an administrator or an educator and

yet when you come into a school building, and it's a whole different ball game. It's

a whole different education that you go through. Your studies help and your

research, your counseling skills, and studying human development, or human

needs. They all come into play! When you stop and think about your plans on

how to improve yourself and improve your school district or the job you have,

you have to take into consideration all of these things.

School leaders should always be prepared and willing to face several challenging

situations every day as a reality of the job. *Noonaki* recognizes that school leaders may

encounter what they will face and may not be fully prepared to handle given situations.

Dealing with negativity is a part of the job, especially as *Noonaki* reflects on working

among students, teachers, and staff members who are often not able to reconcile personal

challenges with school expectations. *Noonaki* believes this is true; for example, some

members of the school community can be afflicted by a dire family situation that requires

their immediate attention away from their duties at the school. School leaders need to

respond quickly to ensure that student learning is not adversely impacted by an issue such

as the absence of a teacher (or staff member), and that all parties focus on resolving any

conflict to enable the student to succeed. *Noonaki* shares these challenges in these two

stories:

Many issues school leaders have to deal with. Are we prepared to deal with it?

A lot of negative behaviors. A lot of jealousy. Factors that are not positive exist

when it comes to working with children and educating them. We as educators

need to put behind our own personal problems when we come into the school. We

need to leave our stuff at home and sometimes there's pressures like that phone

call from home that you cannot ignore because you have to weigh or measure if it

was a serious emergency. I have had to deal with that and put aside what I was

doing for a moment or two. That takes up your precious time, when it comes to

education.

At times parents came into school on the fight because so and so did that and said

that about their children. Not really thinking through the issue because children

will be children. They will always have squabbles and they will always have

disagreements like adults do, but the thing they have to learn is how to resolve

these differences without it being a serious behavior issue. Sometimes we would

run into personalities that are pretty strong and refuse to change their way of

thinking and it took some time as educators.

School leaders need to value new approaches and forms professional development

that are designed to meet specific and collective learning needs of the teachers and staff

members; therefore, school leaders like *Noonaki* need to be diligent in responding to

concerns, changes, or challenges being implemented or enforced in the school. *Noonaki*

describes this in these two stories:

You can train your staff, bring in new ideas, and research on new best practices that researchers uncover or believe are important. Train your teachers and your staff in groups. Our staff, too, struggle sometimes and we need to make sure that they're successful.

Cultural differences created problems in the school because the parents were very irate and came into the school ready to rip the teacher's head off. I had to intervene, settle things, and explain to the teacher. That was a big job, in itself, was when outside educators came onto the reservation, I was educating them of our culture and our language, saying what was appropriate or what wasn't appropriate? How their lifestyle is so different, so removed from our lifestyle. We had to provide training for them, but it was not mandated, so a lot of time, some of the teachers said "Well, I'm through. My job is over at four o'clock. I'm going home."

*Noonaki* appreciated teacher responses to achievement mandates, as teachers were granted the capacity to teach a multitude of different ways to students through appropriate professional development. *Noonaki* believes that providing teachers opportunities allowed them to be innovative and learn from each other. These efforts should be acknowledged by school leaders, as *Noonaki* emphasizes in these three stories:

The big test was meeting Adequate Yearly Progress and documenting the students daily, weekly, and monthly progress they made. That took some time and skill to do and when you're a teacher, there's a lot of skills that you have to bring in to your profession.

The thing that amazed me in these small schools is the ability for the teachers to work with multi-age children and teach multiple grades. That took a lot of preparation and their own time and I was always fascinated how they were able to rotate the students through each lesson by grade level. That took some skill! There were times when the teacher would ask me if I would like to participate. I loved that! Especially in the lower grade levels. Just to sit and listen to the little kids read. The little kids loved to read to the principal or anybody that came in.

School leaders need to expect that they will never likely become experts in the field of school leadership, rather their roles and experiences will continue to allow for them to learn and thrive as they accept challenges and school leadership capacities. Personal and professional growth should be continuously complementary and granted equal attention throughout the tenure of a school leader's development, as *Noonaki* describes in these three stories:

> I'm not a perfect human being. I'm still learning! Education is lifelong learning. You don't learn these things over night! Even in my personal life is still self-improvement is ongoing. You have to work on yourself, your skills, and your knowledge! We're lifetime learners. We don't learn everything there is in one year, one month, one week, or in one day. We go on learning throughout our lifetime.

> I did have the education as a teacher, but I couldn't connect the knowledge that I got from the books to our school setting. The practical experience of being right there was more real. It was difficult to pull things out of the textbooks to apply to

the situations in the school system I was in. I had to rely on a lot of common sense, a lot of failures, trying to correct the failures, and starting up over again. Looking for support and pulling in other people to support me in my endeavors, is what I was trying to do, trying to change! I had a parent that was a special needs student when I was at the middle school. He'd come in on a disciplinary issue on his daughter, and he sat here and he said, "Laura, you're one person and one person cannot change things. This is the way it is!" He was so right! I as one person could not change the situation at the middle school. I needed the staff, I needed the students, and I needed the parents. I really needed the administration, the higher ups in the administration to all support the idea of the change that I was trying to make at the middle school. If you don't have that, then oftentimes you'll run into failure. You don't have to quit because you failed, it just means you have to do it in a different manner!

All of these are so important that our religious traditions and our culture we teach every day and our elders, it's their responsibility to set the learning environment and keep it going. And as an elder, it's my responsibility! As soon as you become aware of these things in your life, it's important to keep practicing or you're going to fall short. Everybody is going to fall short.  Everybody has not lived up to a perfect life! You don't want to hurt people's feelings and go away thinking its okay. Thinking its okay to abuse people. To mistreat people or thrive on the misfortunes of our people. We need to have that compassion and be there for them. As people would say, we're only human! But when we're only human, we

can correct our mistakes and I guess that the main thing is correcting our mistakes
and learning from our mistakes.

<div align="center">Shared Governance</div>

Everyone, not just the school leader, has the capacity to lead within a school to
support student success according to *Noonaki*. All stakeholders who possesses the
knowledge and experiences to contribute to the school, as *Noonaki* asserts, should be able
to provide time and effort to assist the school, either on a voluntary or on a contractual
basis if they have professional skills needed by the school. Student, teacher, staff
member, parent, community member, upper district administration, and the governing
board (or what *Noonaki* refers to as the "chain of command") engages in intentional clear
articulation of community-based expectations for the school leader as they collectively
overcome challenges.

Being a part of the "circle," it is important for school leaders to position
themselves among teachers, staff members, and students. As *Noonaki* suggests, school
leaders are not above others in the school, as evident in the typical bureaucratic
governing structures of schools. School leaders in particular, need to facilitate their
improvement discussions with teachers and staff members, as *Noonaki* emphasized, as
they take into account their perspectives and current work expectations. *Noonaki* also
believes that this pertains to students. As she found, it was critical to seek answers that
informs dialogue between them, teachers, and staff members to address inconsistencies or
barriers to their success or progress. School leaders like *Noonaki* have to be inviting to all

(including parents and community members), as well as make room for them to sit among those in the circle to come together to support students. *Noonaki* expands upon the concept of the "circle" in these four stories:

> Reminds me of a long time language teacher [name omitted], because when he taught the *Piikani* language he'd have people sit in a circle. If one student didn't know the word or if he couldn't say it, he'd tell the person next to them, "Help him, or help her!" That way, it taught humility and it was a humble deed.

> When we have meetings we have prayers, we sit in a circle, we sit, and we don't have one person standing up. You look at our chiefs when they have their pipe ceremonies; they're all sitting, all around the circle. Nobody's bigger, nobody's taller, nobody's better. We're all equal!

> One of the things I always like to use is sitting in a circle. When we were discussing issues like school issues or work issues, we sit in a circle, all at the same level. I didn't like to stand up in front of my staff! I'd be dictating! I sat down and I was part of them. I was equal to them. They were equal to me and their minds and their thoughts were just as important, as mine.

> I believe that brings about being humble and that kind of relates to humility. If you do something wrong, you have to pay the consequences and be humble. An example that comes to mind is when, if I killed a person in a fit of anger or if it was accidental or something, in order to make peace with the other families. You had to go be humble and to the family and assist in the chores or, in our day, we'd say in a person's job or position, you had to take over the deceased family

member's help, his way of helping his family, his clan, and doing things and

making life survivable for everybody. We were not individual people; we were a

group of people.

School size and capacity have an impact on how shared governance can be

achieved by school leaders. *Noonaki* contends that rural schools have fewer students,

teachers, staff, and resources; therefore, it is seen as a necessity for school leaders to

engage their stakeholders when leading improvement efforts. School leaders need to be

cognizant of their abilities to bring stakeholders together and understand the complexities

of variables that could enable or disable shared governance efforts. *Noonaki* points out

that with more students, teachers, staff, and resources, school leaders of larger schools

cannot necessarily look to smaller schools for guidance on shared governance structures.

School leaders of larger schools, according to *Noonaki*, should distribute and delegate

shared governance duties, by identifying among teachers, staff, and students, individuals

who have the influence and knowledge needed, as *Noonaki* explains:

I always recommended to people that wanted to be administrators to start out in

these small, rural schools because they really are a learning experience. You can

always work into the bigger schools! The little schools are a good place to start to

learn to be a school administrator or to be a teacher, because you have a small

population to work with and you can adequately meet their needs whenever it was

possible. Opened your eyes to a lot of little things that we don't take into

consideration. The bigger schools often created failures and frustrations for us. As

an administrator, you learn from these little people, you learn from the

community, and you learn from the little things that we don't normally do in

bigger schools.

With the pressure for student achievement overwhelmingly resting on the backs

of school leaders and teachers, *Noonaki* notes that it is important to also recognize the

contributions of school staff members. School leaders being tasked with difficult

decisions should seek input from teachers and staff members collectively and equally, as

a complementary process to supporting the school's responses to student needs. *Noonaki*

realized that everyone had a place in the circle as she came to recognize how they helped

one another in support of students. *Noonaki* engaged stakeholders in supporting student

instruction, assessment, and school-based activities. School leaders have to ensure that

everyone including staff members is ready to respond to changes through the exercise of

shared governance, as *Noonaki* detailed in these two stories:

> All administrators need to utilize their staff! You need to be on common terms
>
> with them and you need to respect them and not put yourself above your staff.
>
> There are not things that you're prepared to deal with oftentimes and if you are a
>
> leader, you have to be able to assess and come up with a solution. Oftentimes,
>
> when I was an administrator, I would call the people in my staff together and we'd
>
> discuss the issues. As team players, we did a lot of teamwork because I didn't
>
> want to be the only one making the decision. I wanted to make sure that everyone
>
> was involved in a major decision because it affected the people that was working
>
> and had to do the job. It affected the students that we were working with, and if it
>
> affected the students, it affected the parents and the community. A leader has to

take all of this into consideration. It's just not a spur of a moment decision; you have to be prepared to have assistance when the time comes. It was a team decision and I found that worked really well. It was more successful oftentimes than not! There were times when we had to go back to the table again and work on this issue.

It's a lot of teamwork. A lot of staff all work together. A lot of things are decided by the staff, not just the team leaders. Our day started right at eight o'clock when we got there and it didn't end, oftentimes, at four o'clock, when we're dismissed, or five o'clock. It went on. We took our work home with us. The teachers always took their grading, their lesson plans home, and they worked on them so they could be turned in at the end of the week for the following week. So, education is a very demanding occupation. It has a lot of stress with it. We've got to be able to move with the changes! We've got to be willing to make changes and to learn ways to make changes effectively in our educational system. We cannot become stagnant!

## Mentorship

Learning through mentorship is an age-old *Piikani* practice that identifies for individuals the transfer of knowledge through the refinement of their skills. This process is designed to increase the possibilities for those being mentored to make contributions to their community. All throughout her career as a school leader and with her interactions with the *Piikani* community, *Noonaki* has served in a mentorship role for many in school

leadership, those in teaching capacities, and even former students. Mentorship is not received only through interactions with like-minded and supportive individuals; rather, mentorship guidance can even come from unconventional or even adversarial interactions with other school leaders, educational professionals, and community members, who act as "secret mentors."

Individuals who aspire to be school leaders tend to have high self-expectations for themselves, as *Noonaki* did. She was driven to succeed by her confident self-efficacy that served her well in this difficult job. Like many other school leaders, *Noonaki* began working in schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation as a teacher and staff member. In *Noonaki's* experience as a school leader she entered the field with limited experience only to be placed in a school leadership role, as she describes, "haphazardly and with little guidance." No matter who they are or how they became a school leader, *Noonaki* reminds school leaders to model their expectations of others and promote a positive learning environment where students, teachers, and staff members feel supported, and the community feels included. *Noonaki* expands upon this, "…You have to live your expectations and be a positive example!"

Mentorship is mainly referred to as being a humble bond between two or more people. As *Noonaki* applies this to school leaders, she points to a culmination of experiences from others (and in the location(s) which the school leader has or is currently working in) that includes various elements about school culture and community dynamics. *Noonaki* feels that is it important for her to impart on other school leaders the

lessons and knowledge that they will need to understand their role through the

community and its people:

> I learned a lot from the students! I learned a lot from the staff! I learned a lot from
>
> the community! It was an educational environment for me, as a leader, working
>
> and dealing with people. I'm still being educated on how to deal with young
>
> children. Especially with my granddaughter; she's in the middle school!

*Noonaki* credits her own family members as having a profound impact on

mentoring her as a school leader. Their actions and perceptions of her as school leader,

have caused her to reflect on her experiences, time and again. Family members, even

those that are students, teachers, or staff members, tend to be more comfortable divulging

their perceptions and/or concerns to a school leader. *Noonaki* encourages this, whether

done constructively or not (out of anger or disappointment). School leaders need to look

at interactions with their own family as a tool for reflection even if what they are

expressing has no tangible connection to their duties or performance at the school.

*Noonaki* discusses this in these three stories:

> I raised my kids being very authoritarian. Those are the mistakes that I had to
>
> correct later. One of the biggest changes in my life stemmed from my daughter
>
> when she went into the middle school. She came home one day angry with me
>
> and she said, "How come we cannot live like an Indian?" I said, "Well, this is the
>
> only way I know how to live. How do the Indians live?" I was so acculturated that
>
> I didn't realize that there wasn't anything in my home that depicted my heritage. I
>
> really didn't have sense of pride in who I was! She opened my eyes to a lot of

things. A person has to know who they are, in order to assist and help other

people.

We have to continuously work on ourselves. I don't think there's a perfect person

in this world! We all have our faults, our weaknesses, and our strengths that we

can capitalize on. But we also need the support of our family members and co-

workers.

You can correct or help somebody without ridiculing and being demeaning. I

refer to that long time language teacher [name omitted] all the time because I

liked his teaching style. If somebody was struggling with the words, he'd tell the

person next to him, "Please help him? Please help her?" That eliminated that

shame. Shame never did help anybody learn!

School leaders need to hold teachers and staff members to standards that

demonstrate preparedness to teach each student to reach their full potential. As she set the

expectations for the school, *Noonaki* also required her teachers (and staff members) to

submit timely grades and other data needed for her to evaluate their performance, as well

as monitor student progress. The nature of a teacher's classroom is often hindered by the

unavailability of time and resources to devote to every expectation placed upon them.

Therefore, school leaders need to relate to teachers needs by setting clear expectations

and demonstrate how activities relate to them in order to maintain rigor and relevance in

the curriculum. *Noonaki* learned as much from her teachers (and staff members) as they

did from her, as she explains in this story:

One of the teachers that was in Babb, in my first or second year as the principal, fascinated me! She was the most organized person I had ever met in my life. I loved to go in and observe in her classroom, because I could pick up her grade book and lesson plans and they were all complete and up to date. I could pick up any other documentation she had, she had them all in folders. All I had to do was reach and open them and I knew what she was teaching and I knew what the kids had learned the day before. I learned a lot from her because I became an administrator without too much teaching experience. I was just basically moved into administrative positions without having the opportunity to experience and observe what they do.

School leaders need to recognize teachers for their use of effective strategies that have led to student successes, according to *Noonaki*. As she found, teachers positioned among other teachers, can be instrumental in helping a school leader to identify strategies for them to use or modify to fit the needs of their respective classrooms. Teachers mentoring teachers (and school leaders), as *Noonaki* was witness to, builds collegiality that can be leveraged in times where teachers are faced with developing responses to assist in them addressing student achievement demands and classroom management, as described in *Noonaki's* example:

I looked forward to coming to Babb. We had a lead teacher. [name omitted]. She was very efficient and good at what she was doing. She was one of the most proficient teachers in kindergarten as far as I was concerned. It was amazing how she had these kids reading by the end of the first quarter and so on. The progress

they made! There was a lot of progress made out here. Babb Elementary School made Adequate Yearly Progress, I believe, for four or five years. Then, all of the kids were academically capable of moving on into town [Browning].

As a school leader, *Noonaki* was often required to work with other school leaders or professionals within the school district, tribal/local government, and other community-based organizations on behalf of the school. Encountering these other leaders, professionals, and organizations can be a challenge, as *Noonaki* recalls, since each of their styles of leadership and motivations to work with the schools were impacted by their willingness to work with others. Encountering these situations as school leaders requires tact and patience to engage and learn from the negative behaviors of others. *Noonaki* sees these individuals playing the role of a "secret mentor." A "secret mentor" is an individual who exhibits behaviors that others would not replicate. These experiences can provide great insight for school leaders as what not to do in their role. *Noonaki* recognizes this as a way to modify school leaders' own behaviors that are detrimental to their integrity. Although these experiences are sometimes stressful, they can provide cautionary tale for those encountering certain situations, as *Noonaki* tells in these two stories:

> The thing about it, is we [the *Piikani*] don't look down at anybody. We're no better than the secretary, as the secretaries carry a big load.  The counselors, the school nurse, everyone is important! There is no one person in this building that is more important than the other! That is something that is hard for people to accept, because people really do think that they're pretty important people. I've run into people that are highly articulate and very academically intelligent, but they just

cannot get along with people and they create a lot of stress, unrest, and
unhappiness.

If a person comes in here thinking they're a know it all and above other people,
they're going to encounter a lot of difficulties. A lot of school administrators come
in with that attitude, saying, "Hey, I'm well educated, you know I'm da da da da
da. I know so much!" I'm sorry, but you're going to have a tough time working
with other people, as far as I'm concerned.

*Noonaki* humbly accepted school leadership and its responsibilities, as she was
able to maintain her *maanistapaisspipii* or humility, by always being aware of her own
behavior and how her actions reflected her commitment to the *Piikani* community.
*Noonaki* expresses much of her stories with humor, a quality that she believes school
leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation should emphasize in their interactions with
students, teachers, staff members, parents, and community members. *Noonaki* relates her
school leadership journey as being one of professional growth, as her experiences have
led her to support her personal goals through consistent self-reflection and commitment
to self-improvement. *Noonaki* learned most of what she knows about school leadership,
from those with whom she served; therefore, she was able to see leadership as not just her
responsibility, but her charge to empower others to act as leaders. The mentorship
connection is especially strong in the *Piikani* transfer of knowledge, from *Noonaki* to the
researcher, and on to other school leaders. This demonstrates *Noonaki's* willingness to
share what she knows about the importance of humility as it pertains to *Piikani* school
leadership. Humbly accepting the responsibility of a school leader on the Blackfeet

Indian Reservation, according to *Noonaki*, requires a school leader to show *kimmapiiyi-pitsinni* or "kindness" toward the community and the school's stakeholders and to recognize that the complex situations and challenges they will face need to be met with awareness and responsive actions through compassion.

CHAPTER ELEVEN : *KIM-MA-PII-YI-PIT-SIN-NI*

[COMPASSION] OR "KINDNESS"

*Noonaki's* next stories are about the *Piikani* value of compassion, which, she

emphasizes, is as an essential part of a school leader's ability to work with students and

other school stakeholders in communities like those on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

She describes its meaning in her own words as:

> Compassion. *Kimmapiiyipitsinni,* meaning, "kindness," I guess. You can relate to
>
> other people's needs and problems.

*Noonaki* recalls learning compassion early in life as a child. Growing up with a

close extended family and in a rural community, she encountered individuals with special

needs early and observed them and their interactions with others. *Noonaki* became well

acquainted with a cousin with special needs. Therefore, no stranger to learning

difficulties herself, she decided that she had the temperament and skills to become a

career advocate for special education students. *Noonaki* relates her ability to be

compassionate as:

> When you talk about compassion, I think about our special needs kids. They're
>
> ridiculed, they're bullied, and they're mistreated. Before our time, they were
>
> considered to be special gifts from the Creator. They were not abused, ridiculed,
>
> bullied, humiliated, or anything like that. You treated them with kindness, just as
>
> you would other children. You let them learn a trade. I had a relative that was a
>
> special needs kid when we were growing up. We'd go ride horses with his

brothers and sisters and he didn't like horses, so we didn't force him to ride with us. When we were playing games, if he liked the game that we were playing, then he was allowed to join in. If he didn't like it, we didn't force him! He discovered a trade that he enjoyed. He liked to build birdhouses. So, until his dying day, he built birdhouses because they didn't have special education students separated at that time. They just lived at home and they learned from watching others' daily functions. He didn't go to school.

<u>Situational Awareness</u>

*Noonaki* stresses that knowing about the community, the people in it, and the challenges they will face daily is important for a school leader in order for them to encourage teachers and staff members to be responsively compassionate to its stakeholders. Students on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation encounter situations that school leaders, teachers, and staff members may not fully understand, whether in the home, at school, or the community. *Noonaki* recalls that students require school leaders to practice "situational awareness" as a way to gather knowledge, before responding to the variety of needs and circumstances that warrant their attention; therefore, as a school leader, they often have to work with students who at times may not be in a classroom setting due to their preoccupation with personal survival. Many students *Noonaki* encountered suffered from post-traumatic experiences that could be triggered by others at the school. *Noonaki* always felt that if a situation was happening with a student, she needed to be realistic with the teachers and staff members about the student's lifestyle

and other situations that could create challenges for him or her in the school. Understanding where a student is coming from and recognizing the underlying factors that inhibit him or her from learning is critical for a school leader to work with teachers, staff members, and parents. *Noonaki* remembers that issues with challenging students were often not resolved by simply sending them to the office for the principal to deal with them, as this is often rejecting a potential cry for help and could make matters worse, as she describes this in these two stories:

A kid comes in disruptive, there's a reason for it! We don't just punish them and kick them out of the classroom!

When they're denied sleep, rest, safety, and the feeling of wellness. They're being denied their time and it doesn't stop! Our educators are not aware of what's going on in the home or what these kids have gone through daily. In order to put up with these kids, tolerating their differences, their lifestyles, and sometimes what they bring into the classroom, from their individual environments. We aren't all alike and we had to accommodate their needs. That's a big job!

*Noonaki* remembers that school was seen as a safe place for many students who may not feel that way about their own home. She remembers the challenges posed to students entering a structured setting (school) from a sometimes unstructured or unsupportive environment (home), especially if they ordinarily do not know where their next meal is coming from, if they were never read to as a child, or if the adults in their lives suffer from debilitating drug or alcohol addictions that force students to fend for themselves and often for their other siblings. *Noonaki's* school leadership needed to be

encouraging to teachers and staff members to ensure that the structure that the school

provided was a reliable and predictable learning environment in which students felt

comfortable. *Noonaki* supported building strong trusting relationships with students to

engage with them while in school without being preoccupied by what will happen when

they get home, as detailed by her in these four stories:

> Students struggled because they were never exposed to certain environments
>
> before they encountered the school system. The students that didn't have the
>
> structure at home really struggled! There were so many things that we had to take
>
> into consideration.
>
> A lot of kids don't like themselves! I've seen little kids come and when they make
>
> a mistake, they'll hit themselves or they'll hit their heads. I always tell them, "Why
>
> are you hitting yourself?" It was because they considered themselves failures,
>
> saying, "I did a terrible thing. I gotta hit myself to get rid of it!" When you're kind
>
> and compassionate and you do things differently, instead of correcting things in a
>
> punishing way.
>
> Dysfunctionality in the home systems have prompted the formation of programs
>
> in our community to deal with these issues. When a home is dysfunctional, it is
>
> really awful for the students to live in that situation. We have a lot of
>
> dysfunctionality and social ills on our reservation. It came with the alcohol and
>
> now the drugs! It's not so much alcohol anymore, I mean there's still alcohol, but
>
> not as much as there was before the drugs. The effects of drug addiction on the
>
> children means they suffer from the consequences of this type of activity.

I have a family member that's addicted to drugs. She went to jail. She had two

little kids. We picked up the kids and raised them, and she still struggles with her

drug addiction. We are there as grandparents and at least the kids were safe, fed,

and warm! If we knew that their electricity is off because no funds to pay it, we

go make the payments for them!

*Noonaki* relates that students' life experiences of today are sometimes are like

those of a grown adult, as they are exposed to many things at a young age. School

leaders, teachers, and staff members must recognize these traits in students that, *Noonaki*

says, "they carry with them every day," and that they may be reacting out of anger, grief,

or other insecurities that are amplified by factors at the school. *Noonaki* stresses that it is

critical that school leaders have understanding regarding Adverse Childhood Experiences

(ACE) and the conditions in which school leaders, teachers, and staff members can help

students, to balance school rules with accommodations. This is especially true for

students who have a history of behaviors that have not been addressed by prior

interventions. Students who are in their adolescent years who have faced past traumas

and have not been supported by a responsive school environment taught *Noonaki* that

students will exhibit (and be triggered by) behaviors that result in disciplinary actions

from teachers or staff members. School leaders must evaluate every incident for merit or

seriousness, as *Noonaki* describes in these four stories:

A lot of the students come to the schools with their baggage. Even as young adults

that are going into the college system, they still carry the baggage from their

elementary, middle school, high school, or other public-school system

experiences. You have to have compassion to deal with and help them overcome some of the things that they encounter here [Browning Middle School]. I took care of all the behavior referrals and I was sick one week. I had pneumonia! I came back and the referrals were stacked up high. I couldn't even get through all of them. One of the counselors come in and said, "Would you like me to help you?" I said "Yeah!" So, we went through them! Those [referrals] that we thought were not that serious and didn't require attention, discipline measures, or consequences, we just threw in the trash! The teachers got in the habit of writing up every little thing that they didn't want to deal with a referral to get them out of their class. They did this instead of learning to sit and talk to the students and understand where they're coming from!

Their [adolescent students] bodies are going through so many different changes at this time.

Kids that were unfortunate, or that were never exposed to things that would have been assistive in their learning, struggled on a daily basis. As they learned more and more and became more involved in a positive environment… A lot of the parents now don't have the skills to teach these students.

We lose a lot of our young people because of a sense of hopelessness. I was going to work one day and I passed Ick's early in the morning. There was eleven, twelve people standing out early in the morning already waiting for the bar to open so they could get a drink. I was thinking, "Where did we fail these people? Where did they fall through the holes? Because they're young people!" They're young

people that went to school here, went to school in the high school, went to school

with my kids. There are getting to be more and more of these young people that

are street people.

Students can encounter or be victims of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse

beginning with their earliest years. *Noonaki* recalls that it was common for school

leaders, teachers, and staff members, to have no idea about the abuses a student may have

encountered. Beyond bad attitudes and bruises, *Noonaki* calls upon school leaders to

prepare teachers and staff members to recognize the various forms of abuse(s) that

students are likely to experience; she also remembers several of the teachers and staff

members may have been victims of abuse as well. The school can only ensure the safety

and protection of students during the school day; however, *Noonaki* stressed to her

teachers and staff members that they were mandatory reporters of abuse and should

follow appropriate channels in seeking help for students suffering from confirmable cases

of abuse. *Noonaki* encourages school leaders to work to provide students with access to

counselors, other mental health professionals, or services that will support them when the

school takes action on a case. *Noonaki* reflects on abuse as likely a pattern within a

family unit that the school cannot control; however, it is important to give students what

they need to heal and given that students may become abusers themselves or may be

incarcerated due to domestic abuse. Often as *Noonaki* encountered these situations, she

sought teachers or staff members with whom a student had a close bond with, for them to

take the time to work with the student. According to *Noonaki,* many of the students

would not open up to other professionals or even respond to counseling. *Noonaki*

provides some examples of the effects of abuse in these four stories:

> Students, a lot of times, they don't want to talk about their home situations. If
>
> there's physical abuse in the home situations, then they are even more reluctant.
>
> They are taught, "You see no evil. You hear no evil. You speak no evil,"
>
> especially if there's physical abuse.
>
> We imitate what we see, as children. If they see that going on in the home, then
>
> it's going to be a pattern that these children follow.
>
> The kids that are abused really struggle throughout their lifetimes. They become
>
> abusers too, because that's the example that they had set before them.
>
> The domestic abuse doesn't stop. It continues until there's therapy or we confront
>
> it head on and do something about it. Domestic abuse here on the reservation, is
>
> very, very destructive. It's destructive to our well-being, to the children, and to the
>
> family structure. We didn't have that in the old days. We didn't have brutality. We
>
> didn't have this domestic abuse, men beating on women [or women beating on
>
> men]. They had a lot of respect for the women, because the women were the
>
> bread of life and they did a lot. They worked hard and they were the providers and
>
> they kept the families together. Today, that's kind of disregarded and they're
>
> treated pretty bad, when it comes to being disrespectful. I watched videos of men
>
> physically abusing women. I don't know what brought that on but I thought, oh
>
> my gosh! It made me angry. I didn't like seeing that. And when kids see this, it's

hard to imagine what their thoughts are, what their fears are, and how it affects

them when they're traumatized in a school setting.

*Noonaki* reminds school leaders, teachers, and staff members that student

behaviors may be reactions to students not feeling safe at school due to bullying

behaviors. Sometimes those in the school are unaware of what is going on; therefore,

school leaders are increasingly being called upon to mitigate situations that arise in the

community and then make their way to the school. *Noonaki* suggests for school leaders to

be open to student concerns, because many students (including bullies) struggle with

communication at home and their parents may not be able to do much for them unless

they open up to them. *Noonaki* describes the dynamics associated with victims of

bullying in these two stories:

> My granddaughter, she wouldn't come to school for a whole week! She just
>
> refused to get up.  We did everything! I called the principal. I called the truant
>
> officer, the resource officer, even her mother and dad. She just refused! Come to
>
> find out she was being bullied in school and she wouldn't tell us. I had a chat with
>
> the principal and he took us to the assistant principal who came down to the house
>
> to visit with her and she opened up to her. She wouldn't tell us why she wouldn't
>
> go to school! I experienced a lot of problems in this school system with
>
> intimidation by other students. They [the victims of bullying] get defensive and
>
> angry! When you have defiant students, it's basically stemming from their
>
> lifestyles at home and a lot of times we can't go to their homes and change things

for them. But what we can do here at the school, make life as comfortable as possible as well as safe and rewarding.

Part of it is the middle school attitude and part of it, I think, she [*Noonaki's* granddaughter] was getting bullied in school. She didn't want to go to school. A lot of issues there that she's dealing with. But she refuses to talk to me. She refuses to talk to the counselors. Finally, the assistant principal came down, who is a Native American, and she sat down with her at the table and she opened up to discuss the problem that she was experiencing in school. So, with age, I've learned to be a little more patient and not be so huffy about the incidents like what we are going through now. She needs the time to do some thinking. She needs to figure out what she wants to do. She needs to figure out how to take care of herself and make herself happy, I believe it's her responsibility.

*Noonaki* witnessed challenges working with some parents who were not well understood by school leaders, teachers, staff members, and in some cases, even the students were perplexed at the behavior of their parents. *Noonaki* recognizes that many times parents are responding to a system in which they (as students) themselves were not successful. Many parents carry these animosities into their relations with their child's school leaders, teachers, and other staff members. It is common to find students from single or non-custodial guardian households, where a mother, father, or other family member works or is absent from their lives; therefore, as *Noonaki* saw, it is to be expected that not all parents will feel that they want to or are able to dedicate time to support their student (or students) in school. *Noonaki* urges school leaders to not see

parental disengagement solely as parents not being interested in their student's education. Rather, they should also consider that parents struggle daily to support their families and sometimes several other family members as well in an impoverished community. A student's family unit on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation cannot necessarily be compared to the typical nuclear family. Therefore, the school has to be open and accommodating to communicating with parents, especially those who are single, work long odd hours, and/or do not have reliable transportation or an open line for communication. As a school leader in an imposed school system on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, *Noonaki* realized that schools were not designed to accommodate the needs of parents. In fact, as *Noonaki* asserts, "parents have been given the impression that they cannot support their student's education". Therefore, their response is to leave their student's education to the school without interference from them unless they feel compelled to act if a situation arises. *Noonaki* feels that school leaders need to take into account parental and home life conditions students live in; then, by working with parents individually to understand their students better, school leaders can share with teacher's and staff member's information for them to not react based on their assumptions. *Noonaki* describes this in these four stories:

> We had some parents that did not like to go because they felt they were intimidated by the teachers. These were the teachers, you know that had a hard time, I guess, associating with the local community. There's big difference when you come from an outside community, you come from a middle-class family and you're here on a reservation, working with real poor families. You have to have

compassion for all the people that you get involved with in this world [the reservation].

Parents were oftentimes high school dropouts themselves! They too came from dysfunctional homes. The ones [parents] that had the structured homes, had expectations of their kids to learn and for behavior. They had them do homework, reading, and they read to kids when they were young. And a lot of these kids do not have that opportunity! They don't have the privilege of having their parents read to them because of single parent households that are demanding and very stressful. One parent has to play the role of mother and father. Just raising the kids, providing for them is a daily struggle.

My mother worked all the time! Today in today's society we have a lot of mothers working. We don't have the luxury of parents being at home and just raising kids. The majority of the parents I know work outside of the home. They come home and then they have to take care of the home doing the cooking, cleaning, and attending to the children. A women's responsibility is tremendous! I believe, more so than men. So the family support is not there or oftentimes not recognized because of such pressures, like when the parents are not able to support their children in school and at home because of other obligations.

Even though some of the parents now and then, at the time I was the principal, didn't go to boarding schools, I still feel the effects of the boarding school. Colonialism had a big impact on parents! A lot of parents didn't want to get involved when I was a bilingual director. Parents, when I visited them about being

involved in their student's education, they told me, "We weren't allowed to participate! We weren't allowed to have a voice in our children's education! They made a mess of things and now they want us to come and help correct the situation!" In a lot of ways, it was true! So, I couldn't force them to come. It was their choice and very few people actually became involved in their children's education.

As part of the economic spectrum of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, parents may also rely on seasonal employment as a means to support their family, likely outside of the school year as *Noonaki* recalls. School leaders should recognize that seasonal employment also creates many challenges for families throughout the year; as *Noonaki* recognized, seasonal employment impacted the student's preparation, behavior, and demeanor in the school:

> The unemployment rate is high on Indian reservations. Many of the jobs are seasonal. The men and now the women, go firefighting because it generates income for the families. Then, they can, when school starts, purchase the supplies and the clothes that the students need. Otherwise, they might not have the adequate funding for that. There's some people that are not so well off or don't have the funds. Just the bare necessities of life are what they can afford. It's hard for the children!

In a small community, students are often part of a complicated and robust family unit that extends far beyond close relatives, according to *Noonaki*. Students may view non-blood related relatives as family and cousins as siblings; therefore, traumas such as

death can be debilitating to a student's focus in school. *Noonaki* constantly encountered

students who were suffering from trauma, so she encourages school leaders to impart

upon teachers and staff members to show compassion in any event that prevents students

from performing in school. Schools have been wired to recognize only the immediate

family. As *Noonaki* says, sometimes teachers and staff members do not recognize the

nature of the relationship between students and those who passed away, without

knowledge of the family and/or community kinship ties. *Noonaki* also typically saw that

students lose several close family members (or those who they consider close family) in a

short period of time, which may lead them to be chronically absent and not responsive to

the curriculum at the school. School leaders and teachers, in responding to a student's

grief, should work to reasonably reengage grieving students, which *Noonaki* did often.

School leaders should suggest that their teachers and staff members provide students with

the time to catch up as well as grant them access to the school counselor as they work

through their grief. School leaders also need to keep in mind that, in the event that a

student or students pass away, as *Noonaki* was witness to, that students, teachers, and

staff members may also be extended the same courtesy to grieve, even if that means

allowing them time off and extensions on expectations. *Noonaki* describes the impact of

tragedy on school leaders in these two stories:

> Death is another thing that affects children! We have a lot of young people dying.
>
> In car accidents or other reasons. Their life is pretty short and in some families, it
>
> has to do with their lifestyle. It's so devastating to lose a child, even when you're

old and they're older children. To lose a child is one of the horrific and devastating things a parent can go through.

It's been quite a few years [death of a long-standing teacher] and that was really heart-breaking because you become a family. When something like this happens, it's devastating! Devastating to the community and to the families. I would go see her and visit with her and she understood me and she recognized my voice. As she laid there and couldn't communicate, she'd just cry and that was really sad to see. She was a big part of this school because she worked here for thirty-some years with the community and with the children. We have to teach ourselves and the children to deal with these things that happen in our lifetime.

Throughout much of the year, school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, encounter hazardous weather conditions that can prevent students, teachers, and staff members from making it into the school. *Noonaki* recalls the weather creating an additional burden on school stakeholders, especially during lengthy storms where stocking up on food, receiving medical attention, and finding reliable transportation may be unlikely, especially for those individuals and their families who live in the rural areas. *Noonaki* encourages school leaders to be assistive in responding to community needs during times of natural disasters, mainly by understanding the risks facing stakeholders and themselves:

The winter was so bad, there were road closures and some families at Starr School were without groceries. If you work, you're not eligible for the food stamp programs and this one person was a single parent. She just didn't have enough

funds and she couldn't get in to buy groceries. She asked for help and people responded to her request for help. It was amazing how many people were there to help her with her predicament.

## Responsiveness

Responding to the needs of students, teachers, and staff members is one of the significant challenges school leaders face on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. School leaders are the examples that others within the entire school follow according to *Noonaki*. Therefore, how they respond and treat situations sends a message about their ability to be compassionate toward others. Recognizing situations that require a compassionate response by school leaders, as *Noonaki* contends, can help teachers and staff members to identify such challenges especially challenges that students face, as most people do not wear their problems because they do not want others can see them. The rule of thumb for a school leader on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation is to always show compassion to others. *Noonaki* relates this back to school leaders, who "would expect the same from others when they are in need of support." *Noonaki* describes this in these two stories:

> When you're mean and you're cruel and you do things, it comes back on you! They always say, what goes around, come back around. If you're a compassionate person, people will be good to you; they'll be compassionate to you when you're in need, hurting, sick, or when you have some kind of a family emergency.

People can get really critical at the spur of the moment and judgmental, before even taking into consideration where that other person is coming from. I'm not so narrow-minded. I can look at things differently now. I'm not so authoritative or not so demanding!

Compassion is most often used by school leaders in instances when they identify a student's economic or social conditions in the home. *Noonaki* feels that at times, a school leader's style of leadership should be questioned if his or her actions lack understanding for other's situations or misfortunes. *Noonaki* stresses that regardless of the situation, school leaders need to not just voice compassion, but act and be accommodating to the needs of others, especially for students, teachers, and staff members. *Noonaki* explains this in these four stories:

You have to learn how to be compassionate to the less fortunate, accept them and remember that things change! Life changes and any given day, our lives could change to where we're disabled or not functioning like we used to be. We really appreciate other people. I was not always a compassionate person. People must remember, I was a product of the boarding schools. I was quite an authoritarian! It was, "'You do as I say!" There wasn't a discussion! Out of all of the textbooks I read on school leadership, when I got into the Browning Middle School, I was totally lost. But this experience led to me being a lot more compassionate and understanding of other people's lifestyles and situations.

There's a lot of social ills that deprive our children of what they need. Their need to be healthy students, to be academically successful, and to be able to live

balanced lives. Their needs have to be the number one priority and oftentimes our school administrators don't take the needs of the students into consideration. Some of these kids don't have parents that treat them as special gifts.

The social ills that come into the school district and it's a tough situation. I had kids come in here drunk in the morning! At 8:00 in the morning, they walked in, with a bottle of whisky and drunk. I was just shocked!  I couldn't believe it! Those little rascals. They come in the cafeteria and they were drunk! The staff that was monitoring the breakfast come dragging them in, saying, "This guy's drunk, [name omitted]!" Sure enough, this little guy was just drunk and just happy as could be. Him and two or three other girls, they brought the bottle up here and got dropped off at school and they were drinking out on the school playground and decided to bring their booze into the school system. They were just going to have a ball! And so, I had to call the parents on that one. I don't know whatever happened to him, but I run into his older brother in Lethbridge and he was just drunk out of his mind and I thought, I wonder where this other kid is.  I wonder what he's doing. I wonder how his life turned out, because you never forget these incidents.

But we had students like that that just decided they weren't going to be respectful. We have parents that, for some reason, didn't support the disciplinary consequences that were outlined in our school handbooks. They would want to argue about it when it's school rules and regulations to keep the school orderly. In all incidences we have to look at what happened and make sure it was not just a

thing at the spur of the moment. They must have had a bad morning or something happened. So, you know, a person needs to find out what's behind the actions a lot of time. The hidden agenda is always there. Maybe this girl reacted to me just because she was tired of authority or somebody had verbally abused her in the gym or in the cafeteria. She comes through still angry about the situation, but, she didn't tell me.

In addition to knowing that students home situations may be challenging, school leaders on any given day may be called upon to respond to a student's needs with urgency. *Noonaki* stresses to school leaders, teachers, and staff members, that they need to be aware that students may be responding to circumstances that occurred just hours before they got up and made it to school. Students may encounter consistent dysfunction in their home and school leaders need to assure that everyone in the school is there to support them. *Noonaki* notes some teachers and staff members may find themselves in a position to help the student overcome academic challenges, even if they cannot change things at home for them. Actively listening to a student's voice and enacting the school's resources to assist them while in school, as emphasized by *Noonaki*, falls upon the school leader, teachers, and staff members to compassionately accommodate them to be successful in school. These efforts can lead to favorable outcomes for the student, even with unstable conditions in their households. *Noonaki* describes this in a story:

Reminds me of another student that was constantly in trouble, every morning he'd get sent to the principal. He wouldn't last very long, maybe an hour or two in the classroom, and here he'd come! I'd always send him home. One day, I told him, if

you can't function in the school, you have to go home! I was thinking that was his

goal, was to get out of school and to be home, but I found out later, I was wrong!

One day, he came to my office and told me, "[name omitted], please don't send

me home!" I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, this morning, when we were getting

ready for school, we watched our mother pack up our DVD player to go hawk it

to get some wine. My mother was drunk all night!" You know, my heart broke for

that kid, I didn't send him home, and I thought, "What am I going to do with this

kid?" You know, he just needed somebody to understand where he was coming

from, because I had no idea what kind of environment that kid came from that

morning and oftentimes the teachers don't either, that he came from very

dysfunctional family which caused abuse from the use of alcohol and drugs. I sat

there and listened to him and he told me that his problem was that he was a self-

contained student, because he was behind on his work. He was one of those

students where their home life didn't prepare him adequately to be academically

successful. With the drinking going on in their home, he didn't get enough rest or

food nourishment for his body. So, the only way he could get help was to act

out… So I started working with him. He'd bring his work and sit in front of my

office and oftentimes he'd get to fidgeting around and getting into trouble and I'd

say, "Okay, we have to come up with another plan. What do you think we should

do or try this time?" He became involved in his own consequences and to me that

was part of his maturity. One day, I got there early to work and here he was. He

was sitting there and he and his brother had new clean white shirts on and his

mother was with him! He said, "[name omitted], I want to introduce you to my mother. My mother has been sober for a couple of weeks!" You could see the pride in his face. [name omitted] was so proud of his mother that he was willing to ask her to come to school so he could show me that things were changing positively for him in his home. I shook hands with her and visited with her for a while. [name omitted] became one of my constant companions as I was learning the ropes here in the Browning Middle School

Compassion is often tested when school leaders, students, teachers, and staff members encounter tragedies such as the case of a death of a current or former student. *Noonaki* asserts that responses to grief vary from person to person. However, it is incumbent upon the school leader to be supportive of others, even if they, too, are adversely affected by the loss of a student who they grew to cherish. Coping with loss and grief consistently is a feeling felt by those who reside within the community of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation; therefore, *Noonaki* emphasizes that it is important for school leaders to provide support through school resources and advocate for more when they are not enough to meet the needs of students, teachers, or staff when afflicted by tragedies or adverse circumstances. *Noonaki* details this challenge in these three stories:

That summer [name omitted] got in with some kids in a van, I don't remember if they were drinking or not, but, from what they told us at the wake that he didn't want to go with them! He wanted to get off! He repeatedly asked the driver to stop and let him off. Well, he didn't, and the driver wrecked at the Starr School bridge. He was the only one that got killed. It's such a sad story and I think about

that quite frequently. I always think, well, maybe the Creator saw that this little

guy was just not going to make it in life and he didn't need any more hurts or

disappointments. He needed to have serenity and peace in his life, so the Creator

took him!

You never forget these children especially when they are not there for you to

enjoy anymore.

Sometimes the school counselors were so overwhelmed with the issues that we

had to deal with, and it was extremely frustrating as they all needed counseling.

There was a lot of things that happened in the community or in the homes and the

students needed counseling, but we didn't have enough staff members.

The structure of the schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation was not designed

to be accommodating to student needs, rather as *Noonaki* recognized, it mimics the

responses of institutionalization that have promoted punitive punishment over emerging

restorative methods that respond and do not react to behavioral circumstances. *Noonaki*

relates to school leaders, teachers, and staff members, whose typical responses to student

behaviors have led to them to be perceived as not being compassionate; some may

respond in ways that exacerbate behavioral conflicts as students are processed through

the school's disciplinary actions. School leaders need to impart upon teachers and staff

members that they should seek understanding as to why students behave the way they

did, before relegating them to disciplinary action. *Noonaki* saw many behaviors exhibited

by students as a cry for help and could require the school leader to allow the student to

have access to additional supports and accommodations that are not punitive, but instead reward or encourage expected behaviors. *Noonaki* discusses this in these three stories:

Our school system is very punishing! You know, when I became principal, it was, "Okay, you go to ISS [in school suspension] to isolate you. You're being bad!" Instead of saying, "Okay, why did you do this? What made you think that way? What made you say these things that were inappropriate in the school?" Instead of telling them, "These are not acceptable words? You're going to go sit in ISS for two days!"

We have court systems that will force these people to attend different requirements, like anger management, as it was one of the biggest issues because people don't know how to deal with their anger.

It feels so much better when you have compassion for other people. I've heard and seen kids get hurt and injured and heard adults say, "Oh, you're going to be okay. Don't cry. Don't be a crybaby!" I give them a hug and away they go. They forget about it. That's compassion, just taking that time to look at their injury [or situation].

Compassion is not just a feeling, but a response to be witnessed by others, who place responsibility on the school leader to convey compassion in their actions, according to *Noonaki*. School leaders, in practicing compassion in their responses, need to see students, teachers, and staff members as a product of their circumstances as *Noonaki* emphasizes. She feels that students may be responding to a teacher's perceived lack of compassion for their learning needs, teachers may have issues with complying with

district expectations, and some people may just not be able to handle working on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. *Noonaki* asserts that being compassionate to the needs of others means accommodating them in ways that meet the expectations of the school. *Noonaki* stresses to school leaders that understanding when teachers and staff members are not able to effectively respond or do not have the moral demeanor to conduct themselves accordingly that perhaps they should re-think working with students on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. *Noonaki* describes this in these four stories:

> We had another student here [Browning Middle School] that was asleep every morning. He'd come to school and the class would start and he'd be asleep, in nothing flat! The teacher would bring him to the office saying, "I'm not going to have him in my class. I'm not going to have someone come in the school or do an evaluation on me and catch him sleeping! I will get a reprimand for that and I won't have it. I don't know what to do with him? I try to wake him up!" I called his mom and dad in and of course, they chewed him out! A number of times that happened but then finally, he just wouldn't come back to school! So, I asked the teacher, "Do you think maybe he is gifted and talented and is bored in the classroom? Maybe he's more advanced than what you're teaching?" The teacher responded, "Oh no, no way! That's impossible!" I said, "Oh, okay [in a sarcastic tone]."

> At Babb Elementary School, I had one older teacher that had the older classroom. She struggled with her lesson plans. But she was well organized in rotating the students from one activity to another. Her weakness was just getting the lesson

plans written down. She kept it all up in her head and to get her to put it on paper was a chore! But, I never harassed her about it because I knew that she spent a lot of time on weekends here working on her own time, preparing lessons for the week and grading her papers. She lived here [the school], she stayed here! This was her life! These students were her life!

We had the people, teachers that came and stayed maybe for a year or two and left, because this is a unique community. A lot of them came from areas that had never dealt with Indian communities, the poverty that we live in, and what effect it has on our students. We're a community of our own. When we have outside people come in to teach and educate our students they cannot relate to the students. They cannot connect with the students and it makes it so much tougher! Your co-workers, they're all human beings with needs. Unique needs. We're not all alike and that alone is a task. Sometimes you have to really, really study people to get to know them. And you need to sometimes think about the alternative or hidden agenda that some people may have and people are not all good people. We have good people and we have bad people.

As a school leader *Noonaki* recalls encountering teachers or staff members who were not comfortable teaching about *Piikani* culture and language; however, to her surprise, this may be true for both *Piikani* and non-*Piikani* teachers and staff members. School leaders need to be compassionate in providing teachers (and instructional staff members) with training that, *Noonaki* suggests, provides them with strategies that can help them accommodate for curricular integration of the *Piikani* culture and language.

*Noonaki* realized that inside the *Piikani* culture and language exist stories and concepts that can be used to encourage character education in the school, as well as help students build resiliency factors and encourage school appropriate behaviors. *Noonaki* saw the impactful results of the integration of the *Piikani* culture and language, as promising as others in the school became committed to learning and sharing methods with others within the school. *Noonaki* suggests that it should be noted that promising practices exist and have been used to integrate *Piikani* culture and language on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Efforts to fully integrate Piikani culture and language could advance a student's ability to learn from the knowledge and stories within the community that are not addressed by current curricular approaches, as described by *Noonaki* in these three stories:

> Scientifically researched programs that they're studying to use in the school were not being successful with the Native American students there. They just were not able to reach the students and so, I looked at the program and I thought about it and studied it and my advice was, I said, "You know, you have some people that have worked with students and have done considerable research about our learning styles, our teaching methods, our best practices. Why don't you call upon one of them to come in and do a presentation, rather than spending thousands of dollars bringing in this program of the scientific research that isn't going to work with Indian students? Some of the programs that were brought into this school district were not fully supported by the administration. It was something new that had to be tried. At the special education office, down in the basement was

textbooks, textbooks, and more textbooks. New programs, scientifically researched programs that worked in the Caucasian communities, but didn't work in our setting or in our community.  The students just did not fit in, an example of this difference is like an elevator. When you live in city, an elevator is something that goes up and down in a building that hauls you up and down. Here, in a rural area, an elevator is where you store the grains. That's a big difference there! So, when we have these scientifically researched materials and teaching styles, the best methods of teaching do not always work in the setting like we have here. Indian Education for All was also a demand on our school system. The teachers struggled with that because they weren't knowledgeable of our culture. They would often ask, "How do you infuse this into the core curriculum? How do you teach this when you don't know it? With new initiatives, these were issues that we had to deal with and I always personally thought that it was a very simple matter of infusing our culture and our language right into the core curriculum. As I was started working in the schools with the bilingual program, those were some of the hardest things to teach for kids who can't really internalize because they had gone through so much in their lives. These were not important things to them. The important thing was survival and a lot of it on the reservation, basic survival for these kids. They come into our school system and our educators are not aware of what's going on in the home or what these kids have to go through. So, that plays a big influence and as we go along later, that's what I learned about survival and the behaviors of children.

So, here I was at the Browning Middle School, no experience as an assistant principal and working with middle school kids. Our students, a lot of them are having an identity crisis. I find that once they find out who they are and where they come from, there's a vast improvement in their confidence and their willingness to learn. They're hungry for more knowledge! If you don't have an identity, then you're in the crisis mode and it affects our functionality and our ability to be productive members of a community. That's not an easy task, as it is! …I started working in the school's bilingual program, with what at that time was called the Native American Studies department. Those were some of the hardest things to teach and for kids to internalize because they had gone through so much in their lives. These were not important things to them. The important thing was survival on the reservation, basic survival for these kids.

<center>Commitment</center>

*Noonaki* credits knowledge as a major guiding factor in a school leader's response to the challenges they encounter; however, as she explains, "perseverance" instills the internal capacity for school leaders to commit themselves to continuing the support of the school to the community, as active participation has been used to set goals that focus on student success.

School leader experiences have the tendency to be formative as their career develops and some situations have a bigger impact than others, according to *Noonaki*, who maintains this is true when people assume school leadership capacities. A school, its

students, teachers, staff members, parents, as well as community members, are behind each learning moment and challenge a school leader will encounter. As *Noonaki* suggests, school leaders should use formative experiences as guiding factors as they commit themselves to being in a school leadership role. *Noonaki* asserts that school leaders should apply what they learn about students and the conditions which exist in the community. This allows them to also guide others in responding to student needs despite potentially debilitating circumstances, as *Noonaki* discusses in these two stories:

> My first encounter as an educational leader was at the Browning Middle School. I had learned so much about being a leader and about being a human being, I guess being aware of other people's struggles. I don't know about other administrators, but I learned so much from the people I had worked with and the students that I worked with. The students really, really taught me a lesson on what life was like away from the schools. I never really was aware of a lot of their home situations and what they had encountered. The only reason they came to school was survival!  Survival for the kids, even survival for the staff, the teachers. Like I said, Browning Middle School was the biggest education I ever went through in the school system. It taught me so much about our community and about our students. The thirty or thirty-five students that were always being sent to the principal's office for disciplinary actions were the kids that didn't get enough sleep at home. Their parents were either drunk, partying all night, or they were fighting. The students had to live through this and then get up and try to

come to school; survival was the number one thing that they had in mind, not

learning and not the education that we were trying to provide for them.

School leaders committing themselves to being compassionate to the needs of the

students, teachers, and staff members encourages others to also do so, according to

*Noonaki.* It is important for a school leader to initiate with their stakeholders the goals

and other achievement aims that guide planning at the school. *Noonaki* stresses that the

school leader, through the careful consideration for the presence of school resources that

can provide requisite training for teachers and staff members, must also allow teachers

and staff members the time needed to work with students to be successful. As evident on

the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, *Noonaki* believes that school leaders need to be

committed to enabling teachers and staff members to appropriately address student

success, which she reminds can be more challenging with more students, teachers, and

staff members to support or as student's transition to larger schools. *Noonaki* describes

this in two stories:

> With No Child Left Behind we saw the requirements and demands that these kids
>
> had to be at a certain level. Put a lot of stress on the teachers. When that
>
> happened, a lot of kids were left behind and there's some kids that fell into the
>
> gray area. Sometimes, they never did reach the high standards that are demanded
>
> of our students… There was so much testing, so much assessments we had to do.
>
> It just overwhelmed everybody. The teachers, too! There was an unrest among the
>
> staff because of the amount of responsibilities that was piled on them.

> It's even tougher when you get into the bigger schools to be successful because of
>
> the things that come into play, and take place of progress made.

School leaders, as *Noonaki* recalls, are responsible for the welfare and safety of all

students, teachers, and staff members. *Noonaki* experienced times when individuals

within the school felt that they were unsafe or that a situation had compromised their

ability to maintain their contribution to the school structure. School leaders have to

commit themselves to setting expectations for enforcing rules when dangerous or

contentious instances occur. School expectations have to be a collective effort by school

leaders through the support of students, teachers, and staff members in order to help

everyone feel safe and secure. School leaders need to commit themselves to maintaining

a positive learning environment for students and ensure that teachers and staff are well

equipped to handle a variety of incidents, through processes and protocols that are

intended to maintain order in the school. *Noonaki* remembers responding to one such

incident in this story:

> A lot of the commotion started during the transition time and right around the
>
> corner here [Browning Middle School], down the stairs from the eighth-grade
>
> pod. This is where all the fights happened! We called it "Malfunction Junction!"
>
> We always had to station the teachers in areas to keep the students from fighting.
>
> A lot of times the teachers didn't want to be the ones there to stop a fight because
>
> they could get hurt. Some of them did get hurt! The male teachers in here, it fell
>
> heavily on them to help us keep order. We didn't have any resource officers to

come in to help us. We could call the police station, if necessary! But it was

scary!

*Noonaki* imparts upon school leaders, that they may find themselves as targets

when individuals are not happy with the school, other students, teachers, and its staff

members. In the most extreme situations, including acts of violence, *Noonaki* suggests

that school leaders need to be steadfast in committing themselves to not blaming

individuals for rash behaviors, but rather they should be receptive to understanding the

elements in which a situation was able to progress as it did. Especially in the case of

students, *Noonaki* had to be sensitive to the fact that the perpetrator may have been

adversely impacted by another individual (or group) within the school, community, or at

home. When the school leaders are called to address a situation they can become subject

to instances that give them pause or make them question their ability to lead. *Noonaki*

says, "while it is important to show compassion in your official capacity as a school

leader, it is also true that outside of the confines of the school, they [school leaders] still

have an impact on the lives of the students." *Noonaki* urges school leaders to leave work

at work, and focus their time and energy with family and friends, as they too are entitled

to compassion and care, as she describes in these two stories:

> I wear a hair piece because a teacher brought a young lady in my office and I was
>
> sitting at my desk. When she walked in, I had never seen her before.! I don't know
>
> what was going on in the classroom, the teacher just said she was being disruptive
>
> and disobedient. Wouldn't follow orders! She [teacher] left and she sat down and I
>
> went to ask her what was going on. She jumped up to run and I made the fatal

mistake of kicking the door closed so she couldn't run out the door. She turned around, reached over grabbed my hair, and pulled a chunk out about the size of a large orange. It's never grown back! I could cover it with my own hair when it was still thick, but the older I get, the less I was able to cover it. Now I'm trying to grow my hair out again to cover it but it's not working out! I'm tired of this hair piece! But you know, sometimes things happen to us in life and you just have to make the best of the situation. I come to find out, this little girl or wait, she wasn't little, she was big! Witnessed her dad trying to kill her mother at home.  She was just a young child. The dad did some horrible things to the mother that are unspeakable and just totally messed her up for the rest of her life. Unfortunately, she never got the counseling or the help that she needed. I never really did get to know her. Just her mother and her stepdad came to see me. I didn't file charges, but she did get expelled from the school district. Not mainly because of what she did to me, but we found out that she had done this to a sixth-grade girl the previous year. She cornered her in the bathroom and pulled a big chunk of that girl's hair out. The staff had it in a plastic bag and just stored it in the safe here until we went to the expulsion hearing, I brought it down and none of the people were aware this happened.

We can't take their [students] problems on as our own. We could do the best we can for them and assist and be compassionate about their situation and oftentimes it doesn't work out. You never forget these people, because they become a part of you and sometimes, you know, it's hard to separate yourself from them because

you care so much. As educators, you can care too much and it hurts, but like I said, you have to remove yourself once you get out of the building and away from the school. You have your families you have to deal with and you cannot bring your troubles home with you.

Teachers and staff who are committed to the school for long periods of time throughout their career are often the most respected and sought after by school leaders when faced with challenges, according to *Noonaki*. School leaders "grow strong bonds with individuals who they inspire". Therefore, the students, teachers, and staff members at the school sometimes become dependent on them, leading the school leader to hold off on retirement or finding another job. *Noonaki* feels that after long-standing teachers and staff members leave the school, it is a noticeable void felt especially by a school leader who has to fill their position. *Noonaki* says, it is harder to "integrate someone new into the school's processes and structure," and that responsibility falls on school leaders. *Noonaki* believes that it is a true show of compassion by school leaders, to not hold on to people who are ready to leave after a long tenure and in some cases their health and/or fitness to do the job is compromised. *Noonaki* states that a school leader's "main fear in this situation is that they may never find someone to replace them." *Noonaki* said, "school leaders can learn the personal capacity from others to stay in a school for a long period of time," in which they recognize examples of people making positive, long-term impacts on students:

One of the teachers was out here in Babb for thirty-some years and I'd often ask her, "When are you going to retire?" And she'd say, "Well, one more year."

Stating that she had to make her car payments and so forth. She finally retired and

that same year she had a stroke and has been in the continuing care center ever

since.

Compassion for others allows for the school leader to commit themselves to

helping teachers and staff members, especially, as *Noonaki* witnessed many of them who

do not live or have many experiences in the community; these teachers and staff members

are likely to be non-*Piikani* and lack basic understanding of the impact their sense of

privilege has on students that are not granted the same privilege economically.

Expectations of students are often a reflection on the teacher or staff member's

expectations. As *Noonaki* asserts, school leaders, teachers, and staff members do not take

into account students' own motivations and learning expectations. It has long been

thought that students should see themselves in their school leaders, teachers, and staff

members at school. The Blackfeet Indian Reservation schools are experiencing an influx

of *Piikani* school leaders, teachers, educational professionals, and staff members. As

predominantly *Piikani* people begin to work in the schools of the Blackfeet Indian

Reservation, it is likely that inquiry into the matter of this project can shed light on

*Piikani* culture and language's impact on student success. *Noonaki* believes that school

leaders need to commit themselves to mentoring community-based, enlightened teachers

(and staff members), to assume roles in the schools that can have a positive impact on

student success:

Many of our teachers, our staff were not Native American at the time I was an

administrator. They were from different communities, as far south as Texas, with

different ways of growing up. Their environment was totally different! They were the, what we would call, the elite here. They had good homes. They had fine furniture. They had fine clothes. They had working families. That's why I really believed that we needed to have our own people, our own Native Americans trained because we had a few at the time that I became the school administrator. It was the beginning of our own people getting their own education. Becoming our school leaders and the role models for our children. Our children didn't click with these people from other communities that came into our school district.

School leaders have to accept the challenge of making school more relevant to the students and the community, as *Noonaki* articulates, by making teachers and staff members more cognizant of additional burdens and time restrictions they might place on students and complicate promoting more *Piikani* culture and language. Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS) has the ability to frame the school for the community to guide in the implementing of achievement goals into the curriculum and instruction. *Noonaki* urges school leaders to engage teachers and staff members to show the commitment needed to support student learning on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation:

> One of the biggest problems we had, was when we came in with the bilingual education, was the teachers said "I don't have time. I don't have time to teach this. I don't have time to infuse this in the curriculum". And I always thought it was so much easier to infuse Blackfeet words into the core curriculum, than it is to teach it separately. I never could convince the higher ups to do that. So, now it is taught separately. The language is taught separately. The culture and stuff is

taught separately because the teachers rebelled so much about not having the time. They were extremely overworked and stressed out, with all the demands of No Child Left Behind and Adequate Yearly Progress. A lot of their work, they took home with them. They took their papers and lesson plans, they took them and had to work on them at home. So, I can understand where they were coming from, too… As far as teaching these kids and for them to learn, we've got to consider their needs and that's where Maslow comes in and he talks about the human needs. Our human needs! What is the first step in our human needs? We don't take that into consideration when a child comes into this school. We are mandated by state, federal, local, and district governments to meet these certain criteria that are expected to be completed by the end of the quarter or the semester or the school year and a lot of times the educators will rush through these just to reach the mandate of completing these tasks. So, education is, I guess, half-hearted sometimes. We put in an effort and then I guess, all of a sudden, you think, "I'm putting in a lot of time for this and why? What thanks do I get? What recognition do I get?

*Noonaki* exemplifies the *kimmapiiyipitsinni* or "kindness" needed to perform school leadership duties on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, through situational awareness, responsive action, and a commitment to the students, teachers, and staff members at the school. Practicing compassion helps school leaders avoid being misunderstood. School leaders need to create a school environment that values compassion as the glue that holds the *Piikani* values together, turns these values into

action, and sustains the overall conversation of how each value is related to each other. *Noonaki* applied the *Piikani* values in her school leadership to *aisiimoki'* or "to guide" and teach her practices, as she encountered challenges, recognized her successes, and learned all she could from the community to know and maintain her commitment to *Piikani* students. She transfers knowledge by teaching others the utility and purpose of the *Piikani* values in education. *Noonaki* recognizes that the *Piikani* values also require a large degree of personal discipline to address situations like those she encountered throughout her career as school leader on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

CHAPTER TWELVE:

*AI-SII-MOKI'* [DISCUSSION] OR "GUIDANCE, TEACHING, AND DISCIPLINE"

<u>Introduction</u>

As a result of many generations of lived experiences, various forms of Indigenous

leadership developed in the interest of sustaining vital resources and continuing cultural

values, as in the case of the *Piikani*. Leadership enabled self-actualized individuals to

gain the confidence of their community as a trusted, established leader. Colonization

changed how cultural values were emphasized in daily life, especially as leaders became

accustomed to disenfranchisement and corruption; therefore, these individuals were

conditioned to practice leadership in ways that became self-preserving or driven by

personal economic gain. It is through this transformation, that Western leadership and its

structures permeated institutions such as schools, as a means to assert control over tribal

systems.

By institutionalizing tribal systems, traditional leadership traits guided by *Piikani*

values were perceived as inferior, despite the fact that these leadership traits sustained the

*Piikani* people, culture, and language for generations prior to the arrival of European

colonial powers. To re-integrate *Piikani* values, culture, and language into a school that is

subject to public, state, or regional accreditation, the leverage needed to institute *Piikani*

culture and language into the curriculum is limited. As a result, the schools on the

Blackfeet Indian Reservation have demonstrated meager outcomes and have encountered

the increased likelihood of students not succeeding in school or demonstrating the requisite preparedness to be responsive community members.

School leaders trained from the western perspective facilitate a compartmentalized approach to learning, a concept foreign to the experiential nature of *Piikani* knowledge transfer. The *Piikani* worldview is based on a distinct connectedness that informs our behavior as humans in relation to all other things, especially toward each other. Traditional practices of the *Piikani* help to maintain these connections to one another, thus schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation need to operationalize models that seek to integrate cultural values and form a congruent system to support student needs and community development.

Schools, by validating the worldview of the *Piikani*, school leaders must build with the school stakeholders; therefore, methods and practices that resemble norms and nuances found within the cultural existence of *Piikani* students and the community. School systems that were imposed upon Indigenous communities have struggled to gain legitimacy among community stakeholders. As school leadership was practiced, it was perceived to lack responsiveness toward community cultural considerations that can be used to support *Piikani* students. School leaders cannot do this alone, therefore it is incumbent upon them to engage all school stakeholders to assist schools in modeling and articulating community-based values. School leaders exemplify the link between the community and the school as they foster proactive relationships with the community to support student success.

By focusing on the life and career of a long-standing school leader on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, the case study in this dissertation allowed for *Noonaki's* transfer of critical school leadership knowledge both through the capturing of her experiences and involvement in the project as co-researcher. *Noonaki* recalled her experiences in various school leadership capacities and described the interrelated nature of school leadership practices and the seven *Piikani* values: honesty, respect, generosity, spirituality, courage, humility, and compassion. The outcomes of this project demonstrate that effective school leadership is linked to the *Piikani* values, and that throughout *Noonaki's* career, these values have shaped her experiences and professional growth as a school leader.

*Noonaki* served in various school leadership capacities across the Pre-K -14 spectrum on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Therefore, in each experience, she was invested in supporting the *Piikani* values, culture, and language being infused into these systems of learning. *Noonaki* reinforces for school leaders the validation "needed to show them [school leaders] that the *Piikani* culture and language should be a critical component in learning," specifically within the context of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Such validation of community-based knowledge compels school leaders to incorporate those influences into the curriculums and functions of the school, which is now more possible than ever under the emerging Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). *Noonaki's* school leadership endeavor has provided current and aspiring school leaders the opportunity to learn connections between *Piikani* values and responsive school leadership practices to face challenges and build on successes.

Emerging scholarship has emphasized approaches such as Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS), defining for school leaders an indigenized and general framework to model the intentional integration of Indigenous cultures and languages. School leaders, by developing these strategies, can enhance teaching (and learning), capitalize on community involvement, and use community-based knowledge (and protocols) to inform the school's response to student needs. For *Piikani* students, *Noonaki* feels that the integration of *Piikani* values, culture, and language allows for the school to address "whole student" development building on collective values to sustain lifelong learning, as represented in traditional *Piikani* teachings. The Blackfoot Confederacy (which includes the *Piikani*), recognizes the medicine wheel as a living symbol that articulates for everyone the connective relationships that can be used to support learning organizational changes to assist students to find purpose in learning that reflects the community's needs and supports their own personal aspirations.

This chapter highlights connections between the *Piikani* values and school leadership research literature; it identifies outcomes and implications; and it recognizes *Noonaki's* transfer of knowledge as a catalyst to further research. This chapter begins with general recommendations for Piikani school leaders, using the Blackfeet Education Standards (2005) framework to explain the process for school leaders in transferring knowledge of the *Piikani* values. After the general recommendations, the researcher provides an overview of each *Piikani* value and its utility in school leadership, connecting *Noonaki's* stories (and the researcher's narratives) as contributing to school leadership research literature, and concludes each with recommendations for practice.

## General Recommendations for *Piikani* School Leaders

The following recommendations demonstrate the alignment between best practices in school leadership, *Piikani* values in relation to these practices, and responsive strategies outlined by *Noonaki's* experience as a school leader on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. The *Piikani* transfer of knowledge is critical to extracting information from *Noonaki* to provide experiential context to further school leadership discussions on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation surrounding the expanding expectations and skills required of school leaders to meet the needs of the *Piikani* community. The *Piikani* values are relevant to school leaders who assume leadership positions in schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, as a reflection of the students, their parents, and community members, as well as the growing numbers of Piikani teachers and staff members.

As school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation reflect on their own experiences, the lessons learned through *Noonaki's* transfer of knowledge, represent a sustained dialogue between an experienced school leader to current and aspiring school leaders (which includes the researcher). In satisfying external conditions on research, *Noonaki's* experiences also formed succinct connections between Indigenous and Western leadership practices and linking it to best practices research as identified in school leadership scholarship. However, as this project sheds light on *Piikani* school leadership practices, *Noonaki* reminds us that it is important for a school leader to be grounded in the foundations of the Blackfeet Education Standards (2005) and the "Hoop of Values" framework.

*Noonaki* provides context into how current and aspiring school leaders can learn from the use of community-based conceptual models and apply their meanings to understanding their role in practicing *Piikani* school leadership. *Piikani* values are intended to be learned, modeled, and transferred to individuals to promote their usage in everyday life and interactions. This applies to *Piikani* school leadership, as school leaders learn these values as illustrated in the "*Piikani* School Leadership Learning," through the engagement of his or her personal, family, tribal, and organizational influences on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. The "Hoop of Values" framework, outlined in the Blackfeet Educational Standards (2005) is a guide for school leaders to seek insight for the integration of *Piikani* values into their practices.

*Figure 3*. *Piikani* School Leadership Learning Framework
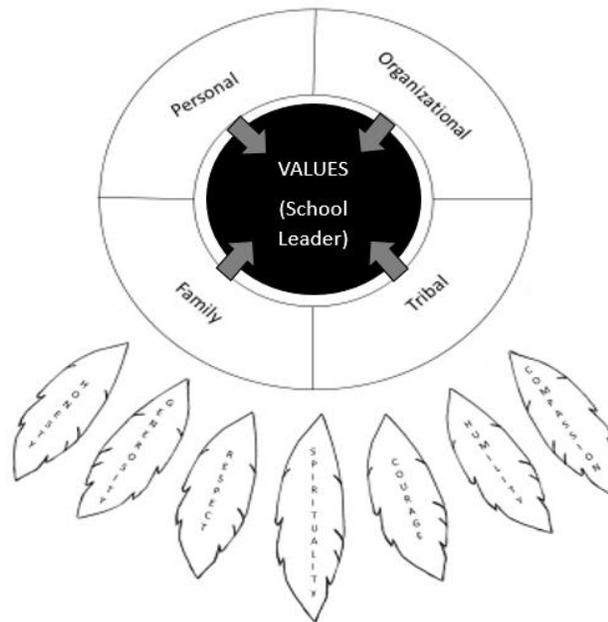
As they apply learned personal, family, organizational, and tribal (or community) values, a school leader's value system should align those values (or practices) to the *Piikani* values, as a way to understand connections between personal values and professional responsibilities. The Blackfeet Education Standards (2005) framework provides the basis for school leaders to move from the "*Piikani* School Leadership Learning" framework to formalize their school leadership approach, which informs their interactions with students, educators, community members, and other schools/colleges/education programs.

*Figure 4. Piikani* School Leadership Framework
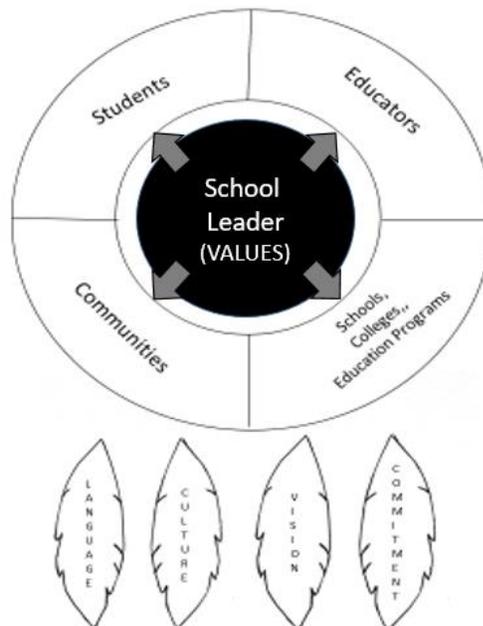
Honesty: Building Relational Trust

Overview of Findings

Central to *Noonaki's* leadership is her dedication to ensuring relational trust through clear communication and appropriate transparency in her interactions with all school stakeholders. *Noonaki* developed relationships with students, teachers, staff members, parents, and community members by being open, trusting, and communicative about her school's expectations and functions. She recognizes honesty was a major factor in her fitness to foster reciprocal relationships among all within the school community, which allowed for them to be a supportive factor in supporting students at the school.

Connection to the Literature

A fundamental shift in thinking is required to reframe how schools interact with the community (Beaulieu, 2015; Ladner, 2000; St. Germaine, 2015), which compels school leaders to adapt to processes and relationships, rather than accept the status quo (Beaulieu, 2015) or institutional norms (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Sleeter 2018) that did not yield the desired results (Beaulieu, 2015). If schools reflect the values and goals of Indigenous communities (Ackley-Chistenson, 2015; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Ledoux, 2005; Martin, 2015; Nutbean, 2010), it will strengthen the integration of the *Piikani* values into school leadership that inform institutional decisions to promote student success through the creation of an optimal climate for learning to occur. *Noonaki* acknowledges that the school leader adds value to solidifying relationality and trust

between the school and the community, and that through this process he or she articulates the contributions of all involved when setting school improvement goals.

Indigenous communities and families place strong emphasis on relationality (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015), and over time, the school leaders understand and support "initiatives" that reflect community need (Serviovanni, 1994) over their professional opinion or beliefs (Bordeaux, 2015; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992; Martin, 2015; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011). School leaders need to facilitate and engage in reflective dialogue among all stakeholders (Barnhardt, 2015(b); Sleeter, 2018; Tippeconnic, 2015), in order to achieve higher levels of inquiry needed to build the school's capacity for change. Devoting themselves to an organizational shift that promotes action in response to outcomes (Bordeaux, 2015; Kelly & Petersen, 2011; Singh, 2011; Tippeconnic, 2015) creates space for more stakeholder input in schools (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015). School leaders communicating with the community instills in stakeholders the behaviors that are compatible with schools' adjusting practices and goal achievement (Barnhardt, 2015(b); Cajete, 1999; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Demmert & Towner, 2003; Kelly & Petersen, 2011; Lindquist, 2015; Martin, 2015; Sergiovanni (1999)). *Noonaki* recommends that school leaders justify their decisions through the articulation of student, teacher, and staff expectations that encourages openness and transparency.

Under a bureaucratic system administration, the school leader is the single most important factor in school improvement (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010; Kelly & Petersen, 2011; Tsianina-Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006), is often devoid of a sense of responsibility,

resulting in school leaders failing to cultivate dialogue to improve school conditions

(Archambault, 2015; Blakesley, 2008; Forkenbrock, 2015; McDonald, 2015;

Tippeconnic, 2015). The leadership structure within a bureaucracy, although rigid, can be

adjusted to meet the needs of those who share a common agency (Barnhardt, (2015(b);

Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Serviovanni, 1994; Wu, Hoy & Tarter, 2012; Warner, 2015)

that encourages others to act, providing leverage for school leaders to concentrate on

innovative ways to tackle school improvement (Kaak, 2011; Martin, 2015; Owens

&Valesky, 2007). Schools entrenched in public education systems are often not able to

effectively communicate institutional expectations to the community (Agbo, 2007;

Beaulieu, 2015; Bordeaux, 2015; Carjuzza & Ruff, 2010; Warner, 2015); therefore,

*Noonaki* relates that conflicts and alienation are often experienced when school leaders

do not practice honesty. Teachers and staff members of these schools bear the brunt of

the consequences from bureaucratic structures (Barnhardt 2015(b); Gleselmann & Ruff,

2015; Serviovanni, 1994; Warner, 2015; Wu, Hoy & Tarter, 2012), as they often times

are not encouraged to communicate with the community (Agbo, 2007; Bartone, 2015;

Blackmore, 2006; Gipp, 2015; Kelly & Petersen, 2011; Lindquist, 2015; Warner, 2015)

or are too inextricably tied into the system themselves to be effective in forming

relationships (Agbo, 2007; Cajete, 1999; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Ibrahum, 1985;

Ladner, 2000; Shield, 2004; Sleeter, 2018; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011;

Tippeconnic, 2015; Warner, 2015).

Recommendations for Practice

Relational trust results from a school leader's willingness to be open and communicative about their school, so that students, teachers, staff members, parents, and community members are clear about school expectations and functions. The school leaders must know that every stakeholder in the school requires the need to feel and be a part of the school-community. A school leader's communication is critical in responding to instances where students, teachers, and staff members may be held accountable for their actions or redirected if they violate school expectations. *Noonaki*, who refers to herself as being, "honest to a fault," also recognizes that honest-trust goes both ways as a transparent, mutual exchange that is solution orientated and seeks positive outcomes for all parties involved. *Noonaki* tasks school leaders to continuously affirm and model such expectations of communication and transparency, as school stakeholders may have in the past lacked trust for the school.

In the *Piikani* community, transparency with regards to school expectations, functions, and decisions is critical in community articulation of student expectations. *Noonaki* emphasizes that school leaders should be cognizant of what information (and to whom it is relevant) is appropriate to share or may be confidential or sensitive. Communication as a conduit of transparency, according to *Noonaki*, must be concise, timely, and issued through channels that are widely accepted, such as through electronic mail (e-mail), written correspondence, and social media outlets to highlight what is going on at the school. *Noonaki* cannot emphasize enough the importance of communication occurring in a variety of ways, including word-of-mouth and other informal means, as

stakeholders have a diversity of (and sometimes a lack of) avenues for correspondence. *Noonaki* stresses that school leaders should, as they navigate the community, discuss and highlight school functions and expectations to stakeholders as much as possible.

In schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, it is essential for the school leadership to form a community of professionals to support the all stakeholders in the communicating with schools that serve *Piikani* students. *Noonaki* recalls teachers and staff members as essential in supporting the relationship between family, community, and the school. Therefore, as *Noonaki* explains, "school leaders must learn to call upon their teachers and staff members," to provide on-the-ground insight to help school leaders to develop leadership capacities within the school to actively inform decisions. *Noonaki* encourages school leaders to communicate concerns early, especially with new teachers, so they can make corrective actions tied to acknowledging the substantial amount of commitment and collegiality that is needed for them to be successful in schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

Respect: Supporting Culturally Responsive Schooling while Meeting External Demands

Overview of Findings

*Noonaki* describes respect as an interrelated reality as individuals aspire to school leadership roles on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. School leaders need to acknowledge that school-based and community stakeholders are important in improving schools and integrating culture and language, as well as supporting tribal self-determination. *Noonaki* recognizes that to support the preparation of students to assume critical roles in leading,

working, and supporting their community, schools have a special responsibility to convey respect in all of their interactions, functions, and goals. *Noonaki* stresses always accepting that all stakeholders have a voice. Therefore, she facilitated dialogue among students, teachers, staff members, parents, and community members as a way to be actively supportive of school-community relationships.

Connections to the Literature

      *Noonaki* credits respect as being essential when using culturally influenced school leadership practices, such as when school leaders guide educators into making needed changes in curriculum using community feedback and resources (Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Martin, 2015; Sleeter, 2018; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011). Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS) involves looking at the entire school and make changes in curriculum, school functions, and how the school engages with the community to garner greater awareness and pride (Banks, 2001; Brayboy & Castagno. 2009; Brayboy, 2006; Demmert & Towner, 2003; Gay, 2010; Ginsberg, 2015; Saifer et al., 2005).  in the *Piikani* community values, culture, and language. School leaders manage diversity among students, teachers, and staff members, especially among those who are not part of or are unaware of the community culture (Kelly & Petersen, 2011; Serviovanni, 1994; Singh, 2011; St. Germaine, 2015). In addition, school leaders who focus on school reforms where the intention is to improve student learning outcomes (Barnhardt (2015(a); Barnhardt, 2015(b); Cajete, 1999; Kelly & Petersen, 2011; Krumm, 1996; Martin, 2015; Moll et al., 1992), are more successful because they focus on enhancing community-aligned curriculum (Agbo, 2007; Blakesley, 2008; Day, 2015; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001;

Sergiovanni, 1999; Sleeter, 2018), and work to meet the professional development needs

of teachers and staff members under their direction (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Kelly &

Petersen, 2011; Krumm, 1996; Ruff & Shoho, 2001). The responsive nature of school

leadership involves community engagement (Barnhardt 2015(b); Curry, 2010;

Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Knutson, Miranda &Washell, 2005; Ladner, 2008; Martin,

2015; Serviovanni, 1994; Warner & Grint, 2015), as *Noonaki* encouraged and supported

teachers and staff members in their individualized efforts to contribute to the achievement

goals of their school. School leaders who promote cultural proficiency among all

stakeholders (Banks, 2001; Barnhardt, 2015(a); Bartone, 2015; Brayboy & Castagno,

2009; Bordeaux, 2015; Carjuzza & Ruff, 2010; Cajete, 1999; Demmert & Towner, 2003;

Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Ledoux, 2005; Martin, 2015; McCarty & Lee, 2014;

Moll et al., 1992; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011; Saifer et al., 2005; Singh, 2011),

depend on community input to materialize cultural protocol (Bordeaux, 2015; Hernandez,

1999; Ladner, 2000) and relevancy into school functions (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Gipp,

2015; Martin, 2015; Shield, 2004; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011; Verbos, Kennedy

& Gladstone, 2011). *Noonaki* did this through the facilitation of her school's response to

a change, which required the intense attention paid to assisting stakeholders in

participating in school and community interactions (Agbo, 2007; Kelly & Petersen, 2011;

Lindahl, 2008; St. Germaine, 2015), promoting relevant curriculum (Anuik, 2014;

Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014), and

providing professional development to help teachers and staff members to respond

(Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Kelly & Petersen, 2011; Krumm, 1996; Martin, 2015; Ruff & Shoho, 2001; St. Germaine, 2015).

<u>Recommendations for Practice</u>

The school is a community of complementary and symbiotic relationships between all stakeholders. *Noonaki* suggests that school leaders make stakeholder involvement a critical component of their repertoire to connect the community to the school in order to leverage community support for addressing student needs. Stakeholders, however different from one another, according to *Noonaki*, can provide a school with the credibility for engaging, facilitating, and positioning each stakeholder group as useful in maintaining a student-focused environment. It is the responsibility of the school leader to provide opportunities for teachers and staff members to observe, listen, and learn from the community. The community assisting the school can inform school leaders, teachers, and staff members about how they can proactively make decisions or changes in ways that do not disenfranchise the community.

*Noonaki* asserts that school leaders need to be aware of behavioral factors that impact their own practices, especially in schools where issues are complex, human resources are strained, funding for new ideas is limited, and parent roles in student learning are not always recognized by families. *Piikani* families place strong emphasis on relationality, and over time, the school leaders learn to understand and support "initiatives" that reflect community need over their own interests. The *Piikani* culture and language are also reinforced by the family unit; therefore, schools have become accustomed to being intently inclusive of families, and avoid doing so in simply

pragmatic and generic ways. As a consequence of limited parental and community involvement in the planning and development of schools, the community may respond in ways that do not assist in achieving goals of the school.

*Noonaki* feels that previous school leadership practices cause *Piikani* parents to not being involved in the educational decisions affecting their student(s). As a result, parents, according to *Noonaki*, often felt uninvolved and/or incapacitated to assist their students' learning and exhibited the tendency to view school leadership and other educators as superior to their role as a parent. *Noonaki* encourages school leaders to invite families and community members to visit the school, provide guest presentations to classes, and volunteer in the school whenever possible in an attempt to develop intentional ways for them to help in making improvements at the school. *Noonaki* calls upon school leaders to provide stakeholders with a framework in which each group is provided with targeted tasks and/or initiatives to assist in furthering the use of *Piikani* values, culture, and language in a school setting.

To prepare teachers and staff members to tackle these challenges, according to *Noonaki*, many of them will need to deconstruct what they already know, as a type of reverse assimilation, where their revised thinking can help them to understand their students through a broader context of culture and community. Through their teachers, staff members, parents, and community members, school leaders can create a school that not only reflects the community and its values, but also incentivizes these stakeholder groups to commit themselves to contributing to their own personal and cultural

development to the school as a catalyst to enact as *Noonaki* demonstrated, the ability to reflect the students' Indigenous identity, culture, and language.

The *Piikani* community is at the mercy of schools to educate future leaders to contribute to the economy and maintenance of the cultural integrity of the *Piikani*. Whether all stakeholders accept it or not, they are closely linked to the Blackfeet Nation's goal of self-determination as a precursor to the exercise of tribal sovereignty. School leaders need to prepare themselves to enact self-determination by designing initiatives that spark interest, ideas, and actions that stakeholders can assist in bringing to fruition. *Noonaki* emphasizes that school leaders, teachers, and staff members need to focus their efforts in building student capacities to be successful within their own community and abroad if they so choose. School culture should be shaped by the beliefs of all within an organization, in order to link schools to resources that positively improve functions, build relationships among stakeholders, and find innovative ways to address decision making through proactive, culturally-responsive school leadership.

Within the *Piikani* context, the Blackfeet Education Standards (2005) are intended to help school leaders, teachers, and staff members to identify patterns or knowledge related to best practices and evidence to support community-based planning and self-determination. *Noonaki* outlines a grounded understanding that the school leader facilitates and does not administrate changes that occur. In public schools seeking to integrate stakeholder input, *Noonaki* notes the presence of political organizations such as unions (for certified and classified staff) that can pose formidable challenges to any change or decisions made that impact their working conditions and responsibilities.

Therefore, they need to be included to contribute to changes whenever possible. *Noonaki* contends that community-based professionals that work with *Piikani* students need to be provided with the space to be influential in school-based decision making, regardless of what level of the organization they reside. *Noonaki* worked to develop reciprocal relationships with all stakeholder groups, which she credits with helping school leaders to identify influential individuals within (and outside) the school; therefore, the community can provide cultural contexts to build upon the framework that outlines the processes, focusing efforts on student success. *Noonaki* believes that any attempt to improve schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation will also require more school-community collaboration, sustained dialogue, precipitating action, and the involvement of every stakeholder.

<u>Generosity: Becoming Flexible to Support Community-Guided Change</u>

<u>Overview of Findings</u>

Generosity is not just giving things; *Noonaki* emphasizes that it is time school leaders and stakeholders need to spend in supporting students, teachers, and staff members. *Noonaki* includes the parents and the community as guiding and supporting factors toward the accomplishment of furthering student-centered approaches to promote positive student outcomes. *Noonaki* urges school leaders to be aware of previous teacher-centered initiatives to integrate *Piikani* culture and language in to the curriculum. As *Noonaki* articulates, increasing the potential for cultural integration requires community involvement in developing school curriculum, functions, and policies. *Noonaki* suggests that reorganizing the school's day-to-day schedules and normal operating procedures to

be more inclusive of community concepts of time, could provide more effective integration of *Piikani* culture and language in development of responses that seek to satisfy student needs.

<u>Connections to Literature</u>

Successful implementation of cultural proficiency means that school leaders need to expect that cultural expectations may not be aligned to school objectives; therefore, flexibility among expectations needs to be negotiated to combine both school and community needs (Archibald, 2015; Bartone, 2015; Beaulieu, 2015; Bordeaux, 2015; Hernandez, 1999; Lindahl, 2008). Effective school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation support student-centered innovations such as maintaining relevant technological infrastructure (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Prensky, 2005; Richardson & Mcleod, 2011), providing resources to teachers and staff members to accommodate for a variety of instructional strategies (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010; Gay, 2010; Hernandez, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Martin, 2015; Richardson & McLeod, 2011; Sleeter, 2011; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995; Wu, Hoy & Tarter, 2012), and investing school time in supporting student interests as well as talents (Barnhardt, (2015(a)); Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Blakesley, 2008; Forkenbrock, 2015; Kelly & Petersen, 2011; Ladner, 2000; Pepion, 1999; Tippeconnic, 2015). *Noonaki* placed special emphasis on her ability as a school leader to be continuously cognizant of how the school's resources and time could be leveraged to create shared commitments (Blakesley, 2008; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Deloria, 1973; Kelly & Petersen, 2011; Shield, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1999) and foster innovation as a vehicle for student success (Barnhardt (2015(a); Blakesley,

2008; Gurol & Kerimgil, 2010; Martin, 2015; Pollack &Zirkel, 2013; St. Germaine, 2015). *Noonaki* suggests that school leaders need to enable the community and other relevant resources to help teachers and staff members identify and/or create strategies that are effective (Blakesley, 2008; Bordeaux, 2015; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Demmert & Towner, 2003; Gipp, 2015; Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Krumm, 1996; Richardson & Mcleod, 2011; Tippeconnic, 2015; Verbos, Kennedy & Gladstone, 2011) among *Piikani* students.

Recommendations for Practice

School leaders cannot lead change alone, and with more demands on them, it was clear to *Noonaki* that she needed to foster collective commitments from all stakeholder groups, by reexamining and contributing to discussions and aligning everything they do to meet the vision and mission of their school (and district). It is incumbent upon the school leader, according to *Noonaki*, as a show of generosity, to consistently voice and express to students, teachers, staff members, parents, and community members, what is expected of them so each one of them can establish collective commitments toward the school. These collective commitments will need to be reinforced often as *Noonaki* remembers that, at times, she leveraged stakeholders to gain support for student needs. The school and community stakeholders should both be included to collectively assist in planning and development of school-wide initiatives that are impacted by their contributions to the school.

Schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation are bound to standardized or externally developed programs that destroy the teacher's ability to creatively and

effectively teach to a variety of different learning needs and students are not engaged or willing to learn, as *Noonaki* witnessed as a school leader. She encourages school leaders to look beyond base-knowledge assessments, by ushering in the freedom for teachers and staff members to focus on student-centered innovations in the curriculum, as a way to develop their skills and create excitement for learning among students. Noonaki recalls that as a school leader, she had to make decisions for the allocation of funding and providing administrative support for programs, materials, and curriculum, in order to meet community expectations. *Noonaki* emphasizes for school leaders the importance of investing in maintaining adequate school technological infrastructure, relevant student activities, focused teacher (and staff member) professional development, and community engagement to support the enhancement of school curriculum. School leaders, teachers, and educators at all levels should engage in creating a learning environment that complements student learning styles and community culture, as *Noonaki* strove to provide for students as a school leader.

Schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation have been too regimented and inflexible to accommodate for a variety of student learning needs; therefore, as *Noonaki* suggests, school leaders, along with teachers and staff members, need to uncover new ways to bring more flexibility to their school's structures and routines. Learning should not be solely determined by the time allotted for it to occur. Rather, as *Noonaki* implicates, learning environments should take into consideration individual student needs and support teacher and staff member abilities to accommodate them. *Noonaki* recalls that restrictions placed on students, teachers, and staff regarding time, were confining and

unsupportive, as they normalized sometimes unrealistic time constrictions. "Indian Time" is real and the students and their parents (and community members) will at times need to bend time, but as *Noonaki* contends, this does not mean bending expectations. *Noonaki* reminds school leaders to re-think how the school's structure is influenced by time. Furthermore, she emphasizes that meeting the learning needs of students requires flexibility. *Noonaki* relates a shift away from performance to competency-based assessment, where learning strategies are complementary to *Piikani* learning styles, and not expected to be within the confines of seat time or the incremental satisfaction of instructional hours.

## Spirituality: Modeling Integrity in Professional and Personal Contexts

### Overview of Findings

Historically, *Piikani* values and spirituality were de-emphasized, ignored and, through the process of colonization, replaced to accommodate mainstream philosophical motivations of assimilation. *Noonaki* attributes the cultural and spiritual decline in the *Piikani* to the perpetuated lack of understanding of *Piikani* cultural systems; therefore, schools especially have systemically integrated foreign practices and beliefs that complicated the functionality of leadership in the *Piikani* community. *Noonaki* believes that a school leader, through their integration of *Piikani* values, demonstrates the competency, vision, enthusiasm, and trust needed to form a school's identity and purpose. In order to maintain the motivational and behavioral expectations of the school, the school leader, as *Noonaki* promotes, is the catalyst for character education and should be

open to community notions of spiritual health and well-being. *Noonaki* recommends that

school leaders should also reinforce their own spiritual beliefs in alignment to *Piikani*

values, which will then lead to the sustained facilitation for the integration of *Piikani*

culture and language into the school.

Connections to Literature

Spirituality compels school leaders to not only subscribe to value systems of the

tribe they serve but to operationalize their own values into how they lead (Barnhardt,

2015(a)); Bartone, 2015; Bordeaux, 2015; Ledoux, 2005; Long Standing Bear Chief,

1992; Running Wolf, 1999; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011; Warner &Grint, 2015). In

a colonized system, leaders have learned to exhibit the tendency to accept values into

their own practices rather than what is expected from the stakeholders (Ladner, 2000;

Running Wolf, 1999). The presence of spirituality in learning is a reflection of self in

relation to the organization (or community) (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Gladstone &

Pepion, 2016; Hernandez, 1999; Pepion, 1999), positioning school leaders to allow for

more contributions among teachers, staff members, parents, and community members to

the spiritual health of the school (Day, 2015; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Gladstone &

Pepion, 2016; Gurol & Kerimgil, 2010; Martin, 2015). However, *Noonaki* underscores

that a personal commitment to student success is strengthened by a school leader's

adherence to their own spiritual enlightenment (Hernandez, 1999; Ladner, 2000). Values,

along with spirituality, can drive social consciousness (St. Germaine, 2015; Verbos,

Kennedy & Gladstone, 2011), but *Noonaki* supports that believing in a spiritual power

may not be enough to encounter challenges associated with school leadership (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Ladner, 2000; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992).

As a practitioner, *Noonaki* strongly suggests that a concerted effort was required to customize her role within the collective to suit the students' needs above of her own convenience or beliefs. Spiritual accountability (Hernandez, 1999) is tied to an individual's actions in instances where decisions are made with the best interest of those who it affects (Day, 2015; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hernandez, 1999; Martin, 2015). Without spirituality in education, *Noonaki* sees a lack of consciousness among all within the organization, which causes an uneven expectation for school leaders who are called upon to model behaviors that stakeholders do not always replicate (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Martin, 2015; McDonald, 2015; Sleeter, 2018). *Noonaki* urges that school conduct should reflect the intentions of the learning environment by ensuring all students are aware of socially appropriate behaviors (Agbo, 2007; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Hernandez, 1999; Ladner, 2000; McDonald, 2015; Running Wolf, 1999; Sleeter, 2018) that enable them to be responsible and confident in their abilities to learn in a spiritually inclusive school (Barnhardt, 2015(b); Bordeaux, 2015; Kugelmass, 2006; Martin, 2015).

Social cohesion and acceptance of various beliefs is also critical, according to *Noonaki*, as it is essential for a school leader to gather an understanding from all stakeholders that each of them can contribute to improving the climate of the school (Anuik, 2014; Kelly & Petersen, 2011; Martin, 2015). Expertise, leadership experiences, and gauging how successful the school leader was in prior circumstances can provide insight into each individual's self-actualization (Heavy Head & Blood, 2013; Stone-

Brown, 2014) and their grounding themselves spiritually to accommodate for community

contexts (Gipp, 2015; Gladstone & Pepion, 2016; Hernandez, 1999;) into the education

of *Piikani* students.

<u>Recommendations for Practice</u>

    *Piikani* values, in the context of *Piikani* school leadership, can become the

common ground in which spiritually diverse schools like those on the Blackfeet Indian

Reservation can redefine the school's purpose and solidify collective commitments from

the community toward achieving student success. *Noonaki* suggests that school leaders

seek to strengthen their own personal integrity and spiritual beliefs through their

involvement and interest in *Piikanii* and other localized spiritual organizations. This is

including, but not limited to, accepting invitations to community ceremonies, faith-based

functions, as a way to inform their own spiritual beliefs to maintain the resiliency needed

to lead schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. *Noonaki* emphasizes active

participation in what supports identity development and spiritual growth for school

leaders to mitigate both personal and professional challenges associated with the

education of *Piikani* students.

<div align="center"><u>Courage: Embracing Challenges with a High Level of Responsibility</u></div>

<u>Overview of Findings</u>

    School leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation are challenged to not just

espouse *Piikani* values, but as in the case of *Noonaki,* to live these values and form

standard meanings so others can learn from their experiences. As *Noonaki* emphasized as

a part of her school leadership, the integration of *Piikani* culture and language required practices that caused her to re-examine the structural routines of her school to accommodate new strategies. In her role as a school leader, *Noonaki* was brave and not willing to back down, despite the push-back she received from stakeholders or other forces impacting her leadership. *Noonaki* reminds us that challenges are all in preparation for responding with the self-efficacy and expertise to perform leadership, especially when being tasked with finding solutions for persistent challenges. *Noonaki* also gathered that in order to perform her school leadership duties, she would have to be willing to sacrifice her own aspirations and personal life, to ensure that the school was in order and the needs of students and other stakeholders were met.

Connections to Literature

Between addressing the problem and formalizing its handling though policy, school leaders need to commit to using their best judgement to address issues without policy guidance (Beaulieu, 2015; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015). *Noonaki* modeled the use of her authority for the intended purpose of protecting student's, teacher's, and staff member's best interests and assessing potential consequences resulting from decisions that she made (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hernandez, 1999; Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Kelly & Petersen, 2011; Ladner, 2008; Sergiovanni, 1999; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011). Most of the push-back is directed at those who accept the responsivity of their administrative capacities (Beaulieu, 2015; Warner, 2015). With such a great responsibility comes adherence to equitable treatment (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010; Pollack & Zirkel, 2013), collective empathy (Gipp, 2015;

Ladner, 2000; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992; Tippeconnic, 2015; Wu, Hoy & Tarter, 2012), and ensuring that changes are inclusive of all stakeholders and rationalized (Barnhardt, 2015(b); Kugelmass, 2006; Sleeter, 2018).

*Noonaki* recognized that by simply having the authority to make a school-wide decision did not mean it was appropriate for her to exercise concentrated power (Blakesley, 2008; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hernandez, 1999; Ladner, 2000; Martin, 2015; Warner, 2015). Unfortunately, she witnessed other school leaders make decisions without a thought about including teachers and staff members (Anuik, 2014; Beaulieu, 2015; Gipp, 2015; Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011; Wu, Hoy & Tarter, 2012). Authoritarian leadership, according to *Noonaki*, is less labor intensive for the school leaders, because they do not have to make the extra effort to gather information and feedback from stakeholders (Archambault, 2015; Barnhardt (2015(a); Blackmore, 2006; Curry, 2010; Freire, 2007; Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Ladner, 2000; Ledoux, 2005; Lindahl, 2008; Martin, 2015; Sleeter, 2018; Southworth & Du Quesnay, 2005). *Noonaki* grew to use alternative school leadership approaches that were not part of her school leadership training. At times these alternative approaches drew criticism from teachers and staff members who had become accustomed to bureaucracy (Barnhardt, (2015(b); Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Grayshield, Hurtado & Davis, 2015; Martin, 2015). *Noonaki* was explicit in her expectation that the *Piikani* culture and language needed to be fully integrated into the curriculum. However, she encountered that teachers and staff members shared some limitations in their ability to teach and/or create new curriculum (Anuik, 2014; Blakesley, 2008; Brayboy & Castagno,

2009; Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Moll et al., 1992; Pepion, 1999; Richardson & McLeod, 2011) to accommodate *Piikani* culture and language. *Noonaki* came to realize the enormity of her role (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hernandez, 1999; Ladner, 2000; Lindquist, 2015; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992; Martin, 2015; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011; Warner, 2015) and the associated challenges, which intensified the demand on her to tirelessly commit herself to the school at the expense of her own personal life and aspirations (Barnhardt, (2015(b); Forkenbrock, 2015; Running Wolf, 1999; Warner & Grint, 2015)

Recommendations for Practice

School leaders need to be courageous in providing more personalized opportunities for students, and supports for teachers and staff members to, as *Noonaki* emphasized, promoting the revitalization of *Piikani* culture and language. Through the engagement of the community, school leaders can implement innovative and culturally-specific changes in school curriculum and functions. *Noonaki* expressed her challenge in school leadership was taking into account the needs of students, teachers, and staff members, as it was unconventional for her to make decisions collectively to improve the school to foster positive student outcomes. Although *Noonaki* was a school leader on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, she still faced resistance when it came to the integration of the *Piikani* culture and language. *Noonaki's* push for a culturally-based curriculum, at the time, had very little research backing such approaches; however, school leadership and other fields in education support this notion as it is shown to strengthen Indigenous student performance in mathematics and reading (Blackmore, 2006).

Change, as *Noonaki* sees it, is inevitable as school leaders are shifting the notion from "students needed to change, into schools need to change," as a precursor to incubate *Piikani* student successes as a result of changes implemented in the school's curriculum and functions. *Noonaki* calls upon school leaders to enhance their own development through the *Piikani* values, which she credits to having impacted her experiences and helped her to persist through challenges. When schools make changes to their curriculum, *Noonaki* says it is incumbent upon school leaders to "require that assessments and other curricular supplements undergo the same revision process to accompany changes" in educational materials and teaching methods. School leaders need to demonstrate that they have sufficient knowledge to translate *Piikani* values into practice, as *Noonaki* stresses, community minded approaches take on challenges specific to Indigenizing schools beyond the confines and restrictions of public education. *Noonaki* recommends that school leaders promote the community as a relevant source of knowledge for bolstering school efforts, as stakeholder engagement can provide the greatest fortitude for school leaders to follow through with decision making, where they can be confident in their own abilities to lead.

*Noonaki* also encountered other school leaders (and sometimes teachers and staff members) who did not take their leadership role seriously; therefore, she became cognizant of invalid or antiquated school leadership practices that were a major factor in inhibiting school improvement efforts. If a school leader's fitness is not tested or their approaches are not questioned, it is difficult for him or her, according to *Noonaki*, to learn from previous experiences, especially if they do not challenge themselves or sustain

community relations as part of their unwavering commitment to promote student success. *Noonaki* connects the *Piikani* values as a critical factor for school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, as they are often operating in a constant state of school improvement. Therefore, it is essential to be consistent, and at times bold, as they guide the implementation of immediate or long-term changes.

## Humility: Self-Reflection and Sharing Leadership with Others

### Overview of Findings

Noonaki recalls humility as being the force behind her own self-reflection and guiding her to sharing school leadership as a way to "widened the circle." In *Piikani* communities, stakeholder input can be used as a culturally responsive method to obtain information. As *Noonaki* stresses, school leaders could use help relating how their practices can be re-examined and/or strengthened. In the traditional sense, this new style of *Piikani* leadership will require them to distribute their "power" and use their influence to form a more consistent model for gathering feedback from all stakeholders, thus justifying their authority to make decisions. Shared leadership, as *Noonaki* supports, should affirm teacher and staff member confidence with more cooperation to alleviate growing pains associated with school improvement. *Noonaki* recalls that without everyone "in the circle," a school leader's decision can have a negative effect on teacher and staff member morale, causing him or her to question his or her commitment to the school. *Noonaki* calls upon school leaders to lead through humor, their own professional growth, shared governance among all stakeholders, and mentorship support. School

leaders who develop ways to integrate community values and expectations into their own professional development demonstrating humility by accepting feedback and using it to improve their skills. Through mentoring, *Noonaki* was able to learn from and reflect on her own practices and values. She extended those same courtesies to her students, teachers, and staff members where they trusted her enough to accept feedback from her. *Noonaki* was able to learn from all stakeholders she encountered throughout her career and lifetime, each experience building on her competency to perform school leadership.

Connections to Literature

Under the elements of shared leadership, *Noonaki* recalls that when barriers are broken down between school leaders and stakeholders, changes are made to accommodate opportunities for meaningful feedback and dialogue (Barnhardt, 2015(b); Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Martin, 2015; Sleeter, 2018; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011; Tippeconnic, 2015). In schools serving *Piikani* students, turn over in school leadership positions is common. Therefore, all within the school who can orientate new school leaders to their shared purpose (Blakesley, 2008; Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Horse, 2015 Lindahl, 2008; Ruff & Shoho, 2001; Shield, 2004; Sleeter 2018; Warner, 2015), enables them to act out the school's vision and mission.  Imposed leadership structures adopted by school leaders, according to *Noonaki*, are ineffective when assisting stakeholders in articulating how they want to contribute to the schools (Barnhardt, 2015(b); Blakesley, 2008; Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Ladner, 2000; Martin, 2015; Serviovanni, 1994; Warner, 2015; Verbos, Kennedy & Gladstone, 2011) on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. For *Noonaki*, changing the paradigm to include stakeholder

input meant that she needed to de-centralize her decision making into a distributive and

integrative approach to rationalize changes to the school through consensus, compromise

(Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Ladner, 2000; Martin, 2015; Running Wolf, 1999), and the

active involvement of stakeholders (Agbo, 2007; Kelly & Petersen, 2011; Lindahl, 2008;

St. Germaine, 2015)

Regarding people within the school who feel that their contribution are not

recognized or valued, *Noonaki* had to be intentional to solicit stakeholders to get their

feedback, as many at first tended to not be receptive to administrative requests

(Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Martin, 2015; Sleeter, 2018; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate,

2011) and were new to being asked for their input on decisions (Agbo, 2007; Brayboy &

Castagno, 2009; Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Martin, 2015). Accepting stakeholder

feedback, according to *Noonaki*, requires school leaders to consider comments and ideas

that may not be their own; however, for them to maintain a high-level of commitment,

understanding the rationale of particular viewpoints is critical in propagating unified

changes within the school (Gipp, 2015; Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Sleeter, 2018;

Tippeconnic, 2015). *Noonaki* learned to cultivate expertise which exists within the

school, so that decisions were not concentrated solely on her as the school leader.

Teachers and staff members should contribute and exercise leadership whenever possible

(Gleselmann & Ruff, 2015; Sleeter 2018Lindahl, 2008; Sleeter 2018). If school leaders

provide the community with guidance, then the *Piikani* values will serve to connect the

people to the purpose of the school (Beaulieu, 2015; Gladstone & Pepion, 2016;

Hernandez, 1999; Ladner, 2000). *Noonaki* suggests that community's perceptions and

viewpoints should drive efforts of a school leader to promote heightened stakeholder

involvement and investment. Thus, school leader's practices will mentor stakeholders in

meeting school expectations (Ackley-Christensen, 2015; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009;

Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hernandez, 1999; Horse, 2015; Martin, 2015; Pepion, 1999; St.

Germaine, 2015).

Recommendations for Practice

School leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation needs to strive to create social

cohesion among both school and community stakeholders, and as *Noonaki* suggests, be

open to new ideas and make a sincere effort can ensure changes are being made to

improve student learning engagement. *Noonaki* recalls the best way to sustain school

improvement is to build on best practices, as school leaders, teachers, and staff members,

"do not have the luxury to start from scratch." Connections formed by schools that

operate with the active participation of the community, according to *Noonaki,* empower

the development of teachers and staff members to collectively devise strategies and

methods, becoming more inclusive through shared leadership, which allows them to

collectively meet school goals.

*Noonaki* also believes whole-heartedly that school leaders need to recognize their

own and stakeholder professional development needs so that everyone has the capacity to

initiate school improvement efforts to plan and respond to school and community

development. *Noonaki* insists that the most promising opportunity for a potential school

leader's development is sustained mentorship from an experienced school leader, and this

approach is culturally in line with the *Piikani* transfer of knowledge. Mentors who take

the time to be guiding influences, as emphasized by *Noonaki,* can help school leaders overcome challenges, develop (or improve) practices, and be more cognizant of their own abilities to lead.

## Compassion: Developing Situational Awareness to Increase Effectiveness

### Overview of Findings

Over 150 years of forceful, hostile, and unresponsive U.S. Government attempts to impose educational systems on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation have caused severe complications which make school-community relations difficult to facilitate and sustain by school leaders, according to *Noonaki*. A school leader needs to possess an enormity of skills in order to mitigate challenges, many out of his or her immediate control. One specific way leaders can achieve this goal is to coach other stakeholders to be knowledgeable about all facets of their student's lives, building empathy for students through consistency of expectations. School leadership on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation cannot, as *Noonaki* emphasizes, rely on traditional, Western oriented school leadership practices that have maintained this disconnection between the school and community reality.

*Noonaki* was trained in school leadership approaches that reflected Western leadership and were devoid of Indigenous influences. *Noonaki* herself found that her training as a school leader was inadequate in preparing her to be a school leader on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. With the lack of replicable approaches in *Noonaki's* context, she felt that this style of school leadership sought to control the school's

engagement with the community, as a way to compensate for what school leaders did not

understand about community dynamics. *Noonaki* was witness to school leaders who

recklessly damaged the school's credibility in the community, because they could not

relate to the community and the *Piikani* culture. *Noonaki* teaches us that effective school

leaders develop situational awareness specific to their school's community context, thus

she was able to identify reasonable ways to respond when called upon to establish a

commitment of fairness and compassion.

Connections to Literature

Memories of school as a "place" in relation to the community provide an

opportunity for *Piikani* school leaders to exercise their skills and practices (Barnhardt,

(2015(b); Blakesley, 2008; Bordeaux, 2015; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Carjuzaa &

Ruff, 2010; Grayshield, Hurtado & Davis, 2015; Running Wolf, 1999; Stone-Brown,

2014; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011). *Noonaki,* through her actions as a school

leader, instilled in the stakeholders of the school the *Piikani* values, as she felt that it was

necessary to further a shared purpose to ensure equity among students, teachers, staff

members, parents, and community members in the school (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010;

Pollack & Zirkel, 2013). The direct impacts on tribes like the *Piikani* being dispossessed

from their homelands has severely diminished cultural consciousness (Cajete, 1999;

Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hungry Wolf, 1980; Stone-Brown, 2014; Warner & Grint,

2015), causing the decline of the *Piikani* values, culture, and language. Knowing the

terrain of the community (including the land) provides the school leader with the cultural

fitness needed to understand the dynamics and realities (Ackley-Chistenson, 2015;

Bartone, 2015; Bordeaux, 2015; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hernandez, 1999; Ladner, 2000; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992; Pepion, 1999; Running Wolf, 1999; Singh, 2011; Stone-Brown, 2014; Verbos, Kennedy & Gladstone, 2011). Thus, as *Noonaki* relates, enabling school leaders to make decisions that are grounded in situational awareness and not solely based on his or her professional opinion (Barnhardt, 2015(a); Bartone, 2015; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Gladstone & Pepion, 2016; Hernandez, 1999; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992; Singh, 2011).

In this sense, theory and practice are not separate, but they are interconnected and continuously interacting with each other; therefore, as a school leader gains experiences, it is clear that all decisions can impact how a school leader is perceived (Agbo, 2007; Day, 2015; Ibrahum, 1985; Kaak, 2011; Ladner, 2000; Lindahl, 2008; Pease, 2015; Running Wolf, 1999; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011; Tippeconnic, 2015; Verbos, Kennedy & Gladstone, 2011; Wu, Hoy & Tarter, 2012). *Noonaki* recalls that school leaders need to seek the use of substantive knowledge about the community to drive their decisions and actions (Barnhardt (2015(a); Beaulieu, 2015; Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Deloria, 1973; Demmert & Towner, 2003; Hernandez, 1999; Knutson, Miranda &Washell, 2005; Krumm, 1996; Ladner, 2000; Martin, 2012; Moll et al., 1992; Owens &Valesky, 2007). To enact situational awareness school leaders should be well versed in the alternative approaches that are appropriate to their specific context (Blackmore, 2006; Gipp, 2015; Hernandez, 1999; Freire, 2007; Kelly & Petersen, 2011; Ladner, 2000; Pepion, 1999; Singh, 2011; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995) when working with *Piikani* students, teachers, staff members, parents, and community members. School

leadership practices do not normally originate from the community, therefore according to *Noonaki*, they fail to recognize the community and its expectations of a school leader. Experiences and beliefs of leadership may differ in the context of local culture in how it is practiced by a school leader (Barnhardt, (2015(b); Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010; Day, 2015; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Ladner, 2000; Long Standing Bear Chief, 1992; Pollack & Zirkel, 2013; Tatman, Edmonson & Slate, 2011; Tsianina-Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Wu, Hoy & Tarter, 2012); therefore, leadership and an individual's acceptance of that responsibility is, in the *Piikani* sense, is a continuous personal journey based on the strength of school-community bonds and instill a personal commitment to educating *Piikani* students.

Recommendations for Practice

*Noonaki* emphasizes that situational awareness is characterized as *issikinip* or "knowing," and that the development of strong teachers, staff members, and curriculum, is the key in aligning efforts that meet achievement aims set for *Piikani* students. *Noonaki* stresses that school leaders require this situational awareness to enact responsiveness to do, *awatniktsopii*, or "doing" as they should strategize a responsible course of action as a show of committing to accomplishing school goals. *Noonaki* encourages school leaders to study ideas and accept the contributions of others, in dedicating themselves to a consorted attempt to relieve school woes or challenges originating in the community. *Noonaki* emphasizes that school leaders need to set a clear path for them to ensure the continuation or to *ispomotsisisini* or "sustain or support" their efforts; therefore, *Piikani* school

leadership needs strong community involvement to fully integrate the *Piikani* values into schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

The paradigm will need to shift away from parents not being directly involved with the education of their student(s), therefore, school expectations, if articulated effectively by the school leader, as *Noonaki* believes, can be met at home. *Noonaki* consistently had to re-evaluate school policies which required her to be more cognizant of how her practices impacted the students', teachers', staff members', parents', and community members' lived reality in the community. In the context of the *Piikani*, current or aspiring school leaders need to listen to, understand, and partner with the community whenever possible. *Noonaki* says that it is important to garner collective wisdom from stakeholders to frame changes, that promote compromise in areas of disagreement, work to solve problems, not make other problems, build on institutional strengths, and collectively develop areas that are identified for improvement.

*Piikani* culture and language, according to *Noonaki*, has in the past, been viewed as subversive and derisory to academic achievement; therefore, school relations with community, family, and cultural influences are recommended as a priority for schools to tackle issues of improvement by integrating appropriate responses for *Piikani* students. *Noonaki* also reminds us that values that are culturally specific for many tribes, like the *Piikani*, do not reflect the values of non-Indigenous cultures, therefore, they have been interpreted as being separate or averse to the realities of the community. *Piikani*, "ways of knowing" have the potential to frame courses and training for school leaders, which *Noonaki* says will help to address the intentional integration of *Piikani* culture and

language in ways that improve community relations, support teacher (and staff member) competency, and promote an overall community commitment to student successes that have positive impacts on the community.

## Implications for Further Research

The need for research has never been greater in *Piikani* education, as *Piikani* school leaders, teachers, and staff members are becoming the majority of educational professionals serving *Piikani* students. This project is an attempt to demystify how school leaders can take from both Indigenous and Western school leadership methods and develop a *Piikani*-specific framework to inform *Piikani* school leadership practices that are guided by the *Piikani* values, as prescribed in the Blackfeet Education Standards (2005). School improvement efforts on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation have dominated conversations and have given very little thought as to the role *Piikani* culture and language should play in accommodating student success. This project relied on the term "school leader" to characterize an individual who is in the capacity to lead schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. In this dissertation, the term "school leader" was intentionally chosen to provide space to examine school leadership best practices to combine Indigenous values, in order to expand its usage in areas of inquiry that should be further explored in the context of the *Piikani* and other Indigenous communities.

Using research methods that are congruent with Indigenous transfers of knowledge will be critical in promoting a greater understanding of culturally appropriate protocols and information dissemination frameworks. This project required a

methodology that pushed the limits of the qualitative research approaches, in order to be overtly accommodating to *Piikani* ways of knowing, specifically focusing on the transfer of knowledge between two experienced school leaders: *Noonaki* in an emeritus capacity and the researcher at the beginning of his career. Sharing cultural knowledge through transfer required *Noonaki* to trust the researcher to use the information transferred to inform his own practices and in turn share with other school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. The time spent between *Noonaki* and the researcher allowed for her to share her experiences with unprecedented depth and will extend beyond this project through a sustained mentoring relationship.

Capturing the essence of *Piikani* school leadership required a sound approach to interpret and define this phenomenon within its distinct context. Both *Noonaki* and the researcher had some difficulty in identifying the relevant placement of particular school leadership practices within the seven *Piikani* values. As in many cases particular school leadership practices could have applied to one or more of the specific *Piikani* values. One example being stakeholder engagement, which although it was assigned to chapter 6 [*Ainnakowe* or respect], also demonstrated relevance to other *Piikani* value subsections such as communication, collective commitments, personal integrity, shared governance, and responsiveness. *Noonaki* clearly articulates that school leaders on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation need to recognize that their influence over the school (as well as in the community) should be used in ways that encourage leadership capacities to develop among students, teachers, staff members, parents, and community members.

School leaders, in order to realistically exercise leadership, according to *Noonaki*, have to rely on the contributions of the school's stakeholders. This is believed to increase the likelihood that their responses and adjustments to school curriculum and functions, will adequately meet the educational needs of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Therefore, it is noted that more research is needed to fully explore the nature in which school leadership is distributed and practiced when school stakeholder groups are empowered by the school leader to act. This project also provided a glimpse into how cross-cultural learning can occur in the context of school leadership, as in the example of *Noonaki's* experiences serving as the rural school principal for two Hutterite colonies. In this case, *Noonaki* was able to pull from both Indigenous and Western concepts of school leadership, to identify which best practices were fitting in a diversity of contexts. *Noonaki* was also witness to the utility of cultural identity and beliefs in the educational process. Lastly, it is to be noted that the use of specific *Piikani* terms in this project is subject to change or revisions as contexts and conditions are better understood through further research and as they are given the liberty to evolve.

## Discussion Summary

*Noonaki's* school leadership stories chronicle her many experiences throughout her school leadership journey on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. As *Noonaki* relates her professional growth to her learning, she forms intimate connections between her learned practices and the *Piikani* values. She also recalls the importance of her formative experiences as a child, building her family, uncovering her passion for education as a

teacher's aide, venturing off to college to gain her teacher and then eventually her school administrator licenses, and assuming various school leadership roles throughout her career. Blended into *Noonaki's* stories are also intimate details about her own self-reflections as she assumed challenging school leadership positions on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, all while being consumed with her own journey to reclaim her own identity through her engagement with the *Piikani* culture and language. In conclusion, *Noonaki* sees *Piikani* values as a way to align school leadership best practices to *Piikani* "ways of knowing." Her sharing is building the foundation for a framework for *Piikani* school leadership through her transfer of school leadership knowledge:

> The values are very important in any race of people or any culture. My personal feeling is if we don't have the values, we're off balance. Honesty in our culture was regarded as a very high virtue because if you're truthful, it's hard to be honest, because we tell little white lies. We're all guilty of that, sometimes without even thinking about that. But honesty is to make sure, you know, you don't harm somebody else with your dishonesty. When you teach children, it is important. When I came out of the boarding school that was drilled into me. Honesty…Honesty… When I started working in the school system, I had people tell me I was honest to a fault. I had to really think about it and then I started realizing that not all people are honest. Sometimes people are honest only when it's convenient for them. I started really re-thinking about my take on honesty and in talking with elders, listening to them, you have to be honest and be respectful.

With that comes respect in return, because you often hear the saying, "What goes around comes around" and that is so true. We have to have these virtues in our lives in order to feel fulfilled and actually just feel good about who we are. When you're dishonest and disrespectful, you don't feel good about yourself. I'm amazed at our new president [Donald J. Trump]. I have to mention that. How he's really been dishonest and disrespectful and it's coming right back at him and he's just really having a struggle now in his own personal life as well as his political life. So, these are the things that we have to look at as educational leaders; sometimes our children have to be taught and oftentimes in our culture, our elders will not tell you, "This is the way to be. This is how you do things." What they'll do, is they'll tell you a story and from this story, you decide what is the right thing to do. We do the right thing because when you don't do the right thing, then you're a very unhappy person. It leads to unpleasant, unhappy situations.

What we all want in life is to be productive happy citizens and without these virtues, I really believe it's going to be an impossible task. When we hoard things and keep them just for the sake of having these things, instead of giving them to somebody that could use them, we are not practicing generosity. Generosity comes in so many different forms. Just the time you spend with kids is being very, very generous. We have to explain those to these kids, as it's just not a matter of giving. By listening to a child, that's being generous, you're giving them your time and along with that is spirituality.

Spending time with my ancestors, they have taught me that spirituality is many, many things: the respect for Mother Earth, the respect for animals, the respect for the human race, the respect for the wind, for families, or birds. We have tremendous respect for an eagle as a symbol of our religious traditions because the eagle is one fine bird. He flies above any problems there are and he doesn't fly below. That, we need to remember, you know. We need to put ourselves above the wrong and the mishaps: we cannot stay in that rut, I guess, is what I'm trying to say.

You have to have the courage to change things. Change does not come easy and in many families, we get stuck in ruts and in dysfunctionality. In order to change somebody, to stop this dysfunctionality, somebody has to step up to the plate and begin the process of change. Our educational system is in constant change. We have to stay up on top of all the new research and all the practices that have been tried and put out there for the benefit of our society. You have to be humble. You can't be arrogant. If you're arrogant people turn against you. If you're a humble person and you treat people with the respect, spirituality, and so forth, you are a much better person, as far as I'm concerned. The arrogant person kind of makes you angry and we don't want that in our life. We don't want to be around people that constantly put you down or step on you. We like to be around people that build you up and that make you feel good. In order for us to be successful, we have to practice that and I have been around people that are constantly putting other people down.

They put themselves above everybody else, they're so much smarter, so much more knowledgeable, they're so much better, they're better dressers [clothes they wear] and everything. I really get turned off on those people. When I hear people, I always say, "you know, practice saying something good, rather than something unpleasant because how would you like to be the recipient of something that's ignorant or something you don't want to hear." Everybody likes to hear pleasant things about themselves. So, that's where humility, I believe, comes in.

Compassion, it goes back to that we are all interrelated. Compassion goes back right to respect. When a child is a special needs person, you have to be compassionate for their situation because it's not their fault. They didn't ask to be lacking in life and to be a special needs person, and we're here on this earth to help each other, assist when it's possible. I got into education because of our special education students, because I worked with these students and their shame was my shame. I felt for them. I had the humility that they had. I had the compassion for them. I didn't want them to feel that way and I didn't want to see other people feel humiliated. Because I cared. That was part of my spirituality and of course, I respected them as individuals. I had to be honest with them, you know, when they asked questions, why people peeked in at them, I'd say, "Because you're just not like them. You're a little bit different, but that's not bad. That's okay. We're all different." I have heard kids say, "I'm not dumb.  I'm not stupid. I just learn different" and I have to agree with them.

I totally agree with them because we don't all learn alike, we're not a mass of animals like cows to be herded in one direction and just follow the leader. If you stand out by yourself and don't believe in some things that are corrupt or don't fall in with the virtues that you're raised with, you have to have, I believe, these virtues in your lifetime, in order to be the successful contributing citizen. If you don't feel good about yourself, you have to like yourself. You have to love yourself before you can love somebody else or before you can love something else. That's the number one thing in our life, is that we all want to feel loved. We want to feel like somebody cares for us. Without the virtues it's pretty hard. A person can go on in life without them, but I don't imagine it would be very pleasant, because they're strictly in the selfish situation. You're just thinking about yourself and not other people. We're on here, on Earth, to care and love and respect and help the unfortunate.

*Piikani* school leadership is an interconnected, multifaceted manifestation of the *Piikani* value system that provides relevant guidance for school leaders to develop practices that are informed by experiences and awareness of the community culture and realities. School leaders are tasked with many duties and impacted by many challenges throughout their school leadership experiences; therefore, it is important that they have the skills to engage the school and the community to focus attention on how to collectively improve the schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Standardized and tired approaches to school leadership and school improvement have not garnered enough credibility to be the sole authority on how this work is to be done to *Piikani* students and

the community. One thing is certain, school leaders do not have the luxury of an entire lifetime to learn how to improve schools on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. But we have *Noonaki*, her experiences, and stories to expedite a process that spanned her entire career, as she transfers her school leadership knowledge on to current and aspiring school leaders.

REFERENCES CITED

Ackley-Christensen, R. (2015). The elder link. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 79 – 103). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Agbo, S.A. (2007). Addressing school-community relations in a cross-cultural context: A collaborative action to bridge the gap between First Nations and the school. *Journal of Research in Rural Education. Vol. 22(8).*

Archambault, D. (2015). Visions of educational revolution. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 79 – 103). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Archibald, J. (2008). *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Vancouver, British Colombia: UBC Press.

Archibald, J. (2015). Raven's story: leadership teachings from an Indigenous teacher education program. In:  D. Aguilera-Black Bear & J. W. Tippeconnic, (Eds.), *Voices of renewal and resistance: Indigenous leadership in education*. (pp. 76-98). Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. M. (Eds.). (2001*). Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives (4th ed.).* New York, NY: Wiley.

Barnhardt, R. (2015). Cultivating education for cultural sustainability in Alaska Native communities. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 265 - 276). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Barnhardt, R. (2015). Theory z + n: role of Alaska Natives in administration. In: D. Aguilara-Black Bear, & J.W. Tippeconnic, (Eds.), *Voices of renewal and resistance: Indigenous leadership in education* (pp. 15-34). Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Bartone, B. (2015). Leadership. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 189 – 192). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Bastien, B. (2004). *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*. Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press.

Bataille, G.M. & Mullen-Sands, K. (1984). *American Indian women: telling their lives.* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Beaulieu. D. (2015). A community of leaders: American Indian policy development. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 57 – 78). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Blakesley, S. (2008). Remote and researched: educational leadership in Canada's Yukon Territory. *Compare: Journal of Comparative and International Education, 38:4,* 441-454.

Bordeaux, R (2015). What are characteristics of effective leaders based on 40-plus years of living and learning. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 277 - 289). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Brayboy, B.M.J. (2005). Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education. *The Urban Review*, 37 (5), 425 - 446.

Brayboy, B.M.J. & Castagno, A.E. (2009). Self-determination through self-education: culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous students in the USA. *Teaching Education*. 20 (1), 31–53.

Cajete, G.A. (1999). *Igniting the sparkle: An Indigenous science education model.* Skyland, NC: Kivaki Press.

Carjuzaa, J.& Ruff, W.G. (2010). When western epistemology and indigenous worldview meet: culturally responsive assessment in practice. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 10(1), 68-79.

Chilisa, B. (2012). Indigenous Research Methodologies. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publishing.

Cowie, E. (2011). *Recording reality, desiring the real*. Visible Evidence, (Vol. 24). Minneapolis, MN: U.Press.

Curry, K. (2010). Shared leadership: A shift in thinking. *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, *2*(1), 39 – 43.

Day, D. (2015). No mountain too high. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 193 - 200). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Deloria Jr., V. (1973). *God is red*. Dell Publishing Co. Inc. New York, NY.

Deloria Jr., & V. Wildcat, D.R. (2001). *Power and place: Indian education in America.* Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing.

Fox, Sandra J. (2015). Creating sacred places. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 113 - 224). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Forkenbrock, J. (2015). The tribal college movement; observation of leadership in Indian country. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 201 - 207). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Francis IV, L. & Munson, M.M. (2017). We help each other up: Indigenous scholarship, survivance, tribalography, and sovereign activism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 30(1), 48-57.

Freire, P. (2007). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53, 106–116.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Ginsberg, M. (2015). *Excited to learn: Motivation and culturally responsive teaching.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin/SAGE Publications Ltd.

Gipp. D.M. (2015). In the spirit of life renewed. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 127 - 137). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Gipp, G.E. (2015). A perspective: Indian education and the federal workplace. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 209 - 233). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Grayshield, L., Hurtado, D. & Davis, A. (2015). Indigenous knowledge and culture-based pedagogy. In: D. Aguilara-Black Bear, & J.W. Tippeconnic, (Eds.), *Voices of renewal and resistance: Indigenous leadership in education* (p. 15-34). Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Gruenewald, D.A. (2008). The best of both worlds: a critical pedagogy of place. *Environmental Education Research*, 14(3), 308-324.

Gurol, M., & Kerimgil, S. (2010). Academic optimism. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *9*, 929-932.

Gladstone, J.S., & Pepion, D.D. (2016). Exploring traditional leadership concepts: a spiritual foundation for Blackfeet leadership. *SAGE Publishing, Inc. Leadership*, 13(5), 571 - 589.

Hall, B., Cox, E., & Burd, C. (2016). *Piikani* digital histories: Community-centered digital storywork in practice. In J. Garcia, V. Shirley, & H. Kulago (Eds.), *Indigenizing education: Transformative theories & possibilities in Indigenous communities.* Information Age Publishing. Unpublished manuscript under editor review.

Hallet, J. et al. (2016). What touched your heart? Collaborative story analysis emerging from an Apsaalooke cultural context. *Qualitative health research, 27(9),* 1-11.

Halverson, D. Troby-Brown, R.A. (2011). Principals and teachers stated beliefs as compared with their perceptions of multiage implementation. Blazing New Trails: Preparing Leaders to Improve Access and Equity in Today's Schools. Yearbook of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration. 179-198.

Hamilton, L. Corbett-Whittier, C. (2013). *Using case study in educational research*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Harchar, R.L., Trahan, M.P. & Broussard, J.G. (2011). Blazing new trails for the educational turnaround leader. Blazing New Trails: Preparing Leaders to Improve Access and Equity in Today's Schools. *Yearbook of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration*, 331-342.

Heavy Head, R., & Blood, N. (2013, October 25). Blackfoot worldview and Maslow, presentation. Presented at the meeting of Blackfeet Community College. Browning, MT.

Hernandez, N. (1999). *Mokakssini: Blackfoot Theory of Knowledge*. Anne Arbor, MI: UMI Company.

Horse, P. (2015). May it always be so. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 140 - 146). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Hungry Wolf, B. (1980). *The ways of my grandmothers*. New York, NY; Harper (Harper Collins).

Ibrahim. A.M. (1985). Reflections on life stories. In J. Ponterotto (Ed.), *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Iseke, J. Moore, S. (2011). Community-based Indigenous digital storytelling with elders and youth. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 35(4), 19-38.

Jardine, P. H. (2007). *Cultural change in the early years of the Blackfeet Reservation: the fieldwork of Charles H. Stephens in 1891*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Company.

Kaak, P. A. (2011). Power-filled lessons for leadership educators from Paulo Kelly, V.L. Petersen, G.J. (2011). Superintendent leadership as the catalyst for organizational learning: implications for closing the achievement gap. Blazing New Trails: Preparing Leaders to Improve Access and Equity in Today's Schools. Yearbook of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration. 59-79.

Knutson, K. A., Miranda, A. O., & Washell, C. (2005). The connection between school culture and leadership social interest in learning organizations. *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, *61*(1).

Krumm, B. L. (1996). *The role of cultural understanding in school leadership*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska - Lincoln), Retrieved from ERIC.

Kugelmass, J. W. (2006). Sustaining cultures of inclusion: the value and limitation of cultural analyses. *European Journal of Psychology and Education*,*21*(3), 279-292.

Ladner, K.L. (2000). *When buffalo speaks: creating alternative understanding of traditional Blackfoot governance*. Anne Arbor, MI: UMI Company.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the remix. *Harvard Educational Review,* 84, 74–84.

Ledoux, M. W. (2005). Institutional mission and identity: how do we carry the culture to the electronic forum. *Educational Technology &Society*, *8*(4), 191-197.

Lindahl, R. (2008). Shared leadership: Can it work in schools? *The Educational Forum*, (27), 298-307.

Lindquist, C. (2015). Visions revisited: Leadership in Indian Country. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 147 - 151). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Little Bear, L. (2000). Jagged worldviews colliding. In M. Battiste (Ed.) *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision* (pp. 77 – 85). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Long Standing Bear Chief (Gray, H.). (1992). *Ni-kso-ko-wa: Blackfoot spirituality, traditions, values, and beliefs.* Browning, MT: Spirit Talk Press.

Marshall, C. Rossman, G.B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research*. 6th Edition. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Martin, D.H. (2012). Two-eyed seeing: A framework for understanding Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Approaches to Indigenous health research. *CJNR*, Vol. 44(2), 20-42.

Martin, J. (2015). Getting the right leadership: ten things we learned being a first-year principal. In: D. Aguilara-Black Bear, & J.W. Tippeconnic, (Eds.), *Voices of renewal and resistance: Indigenous leadership in education* (pp. 142-160). Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Maxwell, J.A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: an interactive approach*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

McCarty, T. L. Lee, T. S. (2014). Critical culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies and Indigenous educational sovereignty. *Harvard Educational Review*. Vol. 84 (1).

McDonald, J. (2015). Leadership and community. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 106 - 111). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Moll, L.C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. Theory into Practice. *Qualitative Issues in Educational Research*, 31(2), 132-141.

Montana Office of Public Instruction. (2017). *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).* Retrieved fromhttps://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Academic-Success/Every-Student-Succeeds-Act-ESSA.

Nutbean, D. (2010). Bridging traditional and new worlds: Exploring a hybrid approach to aboriginal and technology education. *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, *2*(1), 6-12.

Owens, R. G., & Valesky, T. C. (2007). Toward a theory of practice. In R. Owens & T. Valesky, (Eds.) *Organizational behavior in education: Adaptive leadership and school reform* (9th ed., pp. 70-75). Boston, MA: Pearson Publishing, Inc.

Pepion, D. (1999). *Blackfoot Ceremony: A Qualitative Study of Learning*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Company.

Pease, J. (2015). Helps the people: The dance of the seasons: a retrospective on leadership. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 153 - 175). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Pollack, T. M., & Zirkel, S. (2013). Negotiating the contested terrain of equity-focused change efforts in schools: Critical race theory as a leadership framework for creating more equitable schools. *Urban Review*, (45), 290-310.

Prensky, M. (2005). Listen to the natives. *Educational Leadership.* 63(4), 8-13.

Richardson, J. W., & McLeod, S. (2011). Technology Leadership in Native American Schools. *Journal of Research In Rural Education*, *26*(7), 1-14.

Ritchie, D.A. (2003). *Doing oral history: A practical guide*. Second Edition. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Saifer, S. Edwards, K. Ellis, D. Ko, L. Stuczynski, A. (2005). *Classroom to community and back: Using culturally responsive, standards based teaching to strengthen family and community partnerships and increase student achievement.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL).

Sleeter, C. (2011). *Teaching with vision: culturally responsive teaching in standard-based classrooms*. New York. NY: Teachers College Press.

Stanton, C. R**.** & Ricciardelli, L. (2016). Community-Centered digital storywork to revitalize Indigenous knowledges within social studies education. In J. Garcia, V. Shirley, & H. Kulago (Eds.), *Indigenizing education: Transformative theories & possibilities in Indigenous communities*. Information Age Publishing. Unpublished manuscript under editor review.

Rodgers-Stanton, C. & Ricciardelli, L., Hall, B. (2017). *Re-visioning self-determination: Planning for culturally sustaining/revitalizing oral histories with Indigenous communities.  Oral history and education: theories, dilemmas, and practices*. New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ruff, W.G. & Shoho, A.R. (2001). Exploring new teacher induction relationships: a path to establishing a dominant organizational model for schools. Presented at the annual meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration. Cincinnati, OH.

Running Wolf, P. (1999). *An analysis of Blackfeet worldviews, values, and kinship structures.* Anne Arbor, MI: UMI Company.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (2000). *Rethinking leadership*. New York, New York: Prentice Hall.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1994). Organizations as communities? Changing the metaphor changes the theory. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *30*(3), 214-226.

Shields, C. M. (2004). Dialogueic leadership for social justice: Overcoming pathologies of silence. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *40*(1), 109-132.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: a guide for researchers in education and social sciences.* New York, NY: Third Edition. Teachers College Press.

Singh, K. (2011). Preparing future school leaders to foster site level cultural proficiency: investigating the work of successful schools first-hand. Blazing New Trails: Preparing Leaders to Improve Access and Equity in Today's Schools. Yearbook of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration. 297-308.

Sleeter, C. (2018). Multicultural education past, present, and future: Struggles for dialogue and power sharing. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*. Vol. 20(2), 5-19.

Southworth, G. &Du Quesnay, H. (2005). School leadership and system leadership. *The Educational Forum*. 69, (2), 212 - 220.

St. Germaine, R. (2015). Studying exceptional leaders to create a model of effectiveness. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 245 - 252). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Stone-Brown, S. (2014). *Transformation beyond greed: native self-actualization.* BookPatch.com.

Tatman, R. Edmonson, S.L. Slate, J.R. (2011). Self-efficacy and principal involvement in character education. Blazing New Trails: Preparing Leaders to Improve Access and Equity in Today's Schools. Yearbook of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration. 213-226

Tippeconnic, J.W. (2015). Leadership and Indian education: a dozen observations.In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 253 - 261). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Tsianina-Lomawaima, K. McCarty, T.L. (2006). *To remain an Indian: lessons in democracy from a century of Native American Education.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Tuck, E. McKenzie, M. (2015). *Place in research: theory, methodology, and methods*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor and Frances Group.

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2005). On tricky ground: Researching the native in the age of uncertainty. In: N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Tuhiwai-Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Vol. 2). London, UK: Zed Books.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. *The social psychology of intergroup relations*, 33, 47.

Verbos, A.K. Kennedy, M.M. Gladstone, J.S. (2011). Coyote was walking: management education in Indian time. *Journal of Management Educatio*n. 35(1), 51-65.

Vogel L.R. & Rude, H.A. (2015). Native American innovative leadership: motivations and perspectives on educational change. In: D. Aguilara-Black Bear, & J.W. Tippeconnic, (Eds.), *Voices of renewal and resistance: Indigenous leadership in education* (p. 15-34). Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Walter, M. & Anderson, C. (2013). *Indigenous statistics: a quantitative research methodology*. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor and Frances Group.

Warner, L.S. (2015). Concrete teepees, faceless bureaucrats, and learned helplessness. In. G.E Gipp, L.S Warner, J. Pease, & J. Shanley, (Eds.), *American Indian stories of success: New visions of leadership in Indian country* (pp. 177 - 285). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Warner, L.S & Grint, K. (2015). Sacred places: Indigenous perspectives of leadership. In: D. Aguilara-Black Bear, & J.W. Tippeconnic, (Eds.), *Voices of renewal and resistance: Indigenous leadership in education* (p. 15-34). Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is Ceremony*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing.

Whitford, L. (2018). 2018-2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Browning, MT: Blackfeet Nation.

Wlodkowski, R. J. Ginsberg, M. (1995). Framework for culturally responsive teaching. *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 53(1) p 17-21.

Wu, J. H., Hoy, W. K., & Tarter, C. J. (2012). Enabling school structure, collective responsibility, and a culture of academic optimism: toward a robust model of school performance in Taiwan. *Journal of Educational Administration, 51*(2), 176-193.

Yin, R. (2003(1)). *Case study research and design methods.* Ed. 3. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Yin, R. (2003(2)). *Applications of case study research*. Ed. 2. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.