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For Our Children: A Study and Critical Discussion of the Influences on American Indian and Alaska Native Education Policy

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Abstract

Inequities in educational opportunities, resources, research, and meaningful discussion are widespread for American Indian and Alaska Native students in the overarching context of American education. From a policy perspective, many might question the relative non-existence of this population outside a few select education circles. We seek to determine and describe the baseline influential studies, organizations, information sources, and people for American Indian/Alaska Native education policy through the lens of indigenous education experts in the field. Methods include web-based surveys and citation index. The dearth of literature in this field is evidence enough that more can be done to meet the needs of this diverse and unique set of students. The study seeks to move American Indian/Alaska Native issues into the general education policy conversation and to serve as a catalyst for critical conversations about the education of American Indian and Alaskan Native students. By understanding the origins of education policy affecting American Indian/Alaskan Natives, this study advances critical scholarship and practice providing insight into the people themselves; what they value, who they trust, and what is most influential and important to them in terms of the future of their children.

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Introduction

Inequities in educational opportunities, resources, research, and meaningful discussion are widespread for American Indian and Alaska Native students in the overarching context of American education. One explanation of this may be that these students comprise a mere 1.2 percent of the total population of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in the United States (Snyder & Dillows, 2010). Another factor may be that due to lower population numbers, there are fewer American Indian or Alaska Native people ascending to the rank of research faculty, resulting in a dismal 0.4 percent of the professoriate in the U.S. contributing to the scholarly base on American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) topics (Snyder & Dillows, 2010). From a policy perspective, many might question the relative non-existence of this population outside a few select education circles; however, since the inception of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), policy makers and educators have been forced to acknowledge this often overlooked sub-group for accountability purposes.

Development of a Resource that may Influence Policy Development

Rather than seeking to explain inequities between this population and others, a task several scholars have attempted to tackle (Knowles, 2012; Lovern, 2012; Mackey, 2012), this study examines change agents. Through the lens of indigenous education experts, we seek to determine the baseline influential studies, organizations, information sources, and people for American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) education policy. This is important for a number of reasons. First, although scholars such as Swanson and Barlage (2006) have addressed influences on American education in general, few have analyzed these influences by sub-group effect, which gives the impression that these influences can be generalized across all groups. This is problematic given NCLB's disaggregation and accountability measures were drafted in response to historic dismissal of sub-group differences. Second, as scholars in the field of American Indian/Alaska Native education, we noticed that the Swanson and Barlage study, *Influence: A Study of the Factors Shaping Education Policy* (2006), did not include the influential studies, people, or policies that are found in indigenous education research. The question of what influences AI/AN educational policy seemed straightforward at first. The authors have combined careers of nearly fifty years working for American Indians and Alaska Natives. We became interested in this question after carefully reviewing the work of Swanson and Barlage. In many respects, we chose to mirror some of the questions and techniques of their larger project using American Indians and Alaska Natives as our expert panel.

We are familiar with the need to acknowledge the variety (and sheer numbers) of different tribal sovereign nations in the United States and the necessity of acknowledging that each tribal culture and tradition would affect our sample—unlike Swanson and Barlage who believe that they have one cultural sample for their study. Lack of numbers for a subset of tribal members, however, prevented us from disaggregating the data by tribe. We believe, however, that you will find this look at educational policy on AI/AN to be informative, particularly as it elicited questions about the future of American Indian/Alaska Native educational policy and practice such as why clearly identified barriers to academic success for AI/AN students, first documented in the 1928 Meriam Report (*The Problem of Indian Administration*) are still regarded as unresolved. An analysis of the Meriam Report and the 1969 Kennedy Report (*Indian Education: A National Tragedy—A National Challenge*) reveals, for example, that both studies recommended greater control by Indian parents and the addition of adequate funding. In practice, some school districts have increased the voice of American Indian/Alaska Native tribes, but it is more an exception that Indian parents have the authority to impact the curriculum (Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996). It is uncontested that the funding streams to tribal schools are inadequate. Policies provide all constituents with a framework to create opportunities for success in school and yet public schools continue to educate these culturally diverse populations from a distinctly pro-assimilation standpoint despite its historic use as a culturally destructive weapon.

To provide context, it is important that we briefly describe the perpetually unresolved issues found in AI/AN education. Both the Merriam and Kennedy Reports document the neglected trust responsibility the federal government holds as part of the land treaties that led to White settlement of the west (Beaulieu, 2000). One key unresolved issue includes the perpetuation of an assimilation viewpoint by educating minority groups within a dominant group with the expectation that the minority group will adopt the values and normative features of the dominant group. Another issue revolves around the fact that American Indians and Alaska Natives are designated within the U.S. Constitution as having a government-to-government relationship with the federal government; therefore, tribal self-determination (in which tribes are provided the legal ability to govern their own people) is curtailed when tribes are educated to the point of cultural termination. These issues are central to AI/AN education policy with respect to federal responsibility and cultural preservation (Beaulieu, 2000).

In this study, we present the findings of each of four categories analyzed—Influential Studies, Influential Organizations, Influential Information Sources, and Influential Persons—overlapped to a significant degree. Again, this is likely the result of the small numbers of American Indians within the larger population. We did not provide definitions for any of the

categories, rather the definitions of “influence” and “policy” were left to the discretion of each respondent.

Methodology

The following section describes the development and implementation of the methods used within our study. Initially, we used a web-based data collection tool, Survey Monkey, to collect our data and to elicit nominations from our initial core of respondents for other names of individuals who might wish to participate. Each of the surveys allowed participants to forward the email address of up to ten individuals they believed would have knowledge about or interest in participating in the survey. To complement the survey data collection, the research design also included a systematic citation analysis of the top-ranked studies using two distinct electronic information systems. This is a direct mirror of the approach used by Swanson and Barlage and allowed us to measure the exposure of studies in the news media and in peer reviewed research literature.

We replicated Swanson and Barlage’s study using a parallel rationale for the study (determining influences) and parallel collection procedures (web-based surveys). We added an incentive to improve participation levels for our survey (Goertz, 2006) wherein all respondents were entered in a random drawing for a \$500 donation in their name to the American Indian Higher Education Consortium.

Study Participants

To compile the sample for the current study, we first identified and selected tribal college presidents, college professors, and school administrators recognized for expert knowledge in AI/AN education and policy, both in theory and practice. Within these broad areas, we began the initial survey. As our participants completed the survey, many of them listed colleagues’ email addresses and these were added to the participant list. A total of 219 emails were sent to Indian educators inviting them to participate in the study. 125 people responded to the survey for a response rate of 57 percent. Among the non-respondents, if an individual withdrew after having been nominated by a colleague, we removed them from the sample. Expert surveys are often characterized by low responses rate; however, we believe that our survey generated interest, in part, because of the larger study by Swanson and Barlage and also because the focus was narrow enough to capture a small, but highly motivated special interest group, American Indian/Alaska Native educators, administrators, and scholars. We did not send out a second-round rating survey because our initial round returned general consensus among participants across data points and we had a significant response rate on the first distribution.

Indigenous Education Expert-based Methods

Swanson and Barlage designed their study to elicit expert consensus regarding the leading influences over education policy during the last decade, meaning they returned results to participants for review. We did not return our results to our panel for a second review. We did not use the second tier because the first set of responses was not that varied and we believed we had consensus. We were looking at a much smaller set of policy pieces and as a result, the range of responses was not as wide as it may have been in the broader study by Swanson and Barlage.

Our study measured influence by employing the expert assessments of AI/AN educators. We asked them to share their perspectives by nominating studies, organizations, news stories, and people. Expert-based methods, such as this, attempt to develop a consensus on a topic, in this instance, an ostensibly agreed upon notion of which studies, organizations, news stories and people are deemed most influential by recognized experts. Consensus decision-making is found in numerous indigenous governance systems and we believed this method would eliminate the single-perspective bias of an interview and the negative aspects of group dynamics. Adler and Ziglio (1996) and others defined this method as a structured process for collecting and distilling knowledge. Although Swanson and Barlage took a snapshot of the past decade, we determined that our experts were most qualified to identify the timeframe and importance of influence within categories since influential pieces could be found as far back as the early 20th century. The resultant responses were typically framed in a contemporary context, there were some notable exceptions. Situating the relationship between American Indian and Alaskan Native education within the United States is a fluid process that requires an observer to ebb and flows across time and space, reducing the utility of defining notions of “current.” Many of our colleagues agreed, as the results indicate.

Web-based Surveys and Data Procedures

We chose to use a web-based survey for conducting this study because we expected our population to have Internet access. Dillman (2000) reported that web based survey research reports were well-suited and appropriate for expert based research. Response rates do not differ significantly based on mode of delivery for expert surveys; essentially, the same numbers of individuals were expected to respond on the web as you might expect to return the paper copy (Carini, Hayek, Kuh, Kennedy, & Ouimet, 2003; Cook, Heath, & Thompson, 2000; Denscombe, 2006; Roztocki & Morgan, 2002). No paper copies of the survey were distributed.

The open-ended responses were tallied and coded. Similar to Swanson and Barlage's study, the responses to the "influential studies" category proved somewhat challenging to compile. Individuals tended to nominate a body of work by a researcher or educator. Also individuals nominated works that mainstream academics would not consider "studies". These works often include essays and curriculum pieces.

Citation Searches

In addition to fielding expert-based surveys, we also performed a citation analysis for the top-ranked studies. For this portion of our study, we used *Google Scholar* because it most effectively located the number and types of studies we analyzed. We decided to work with *Google Scholar* because it indexes non-traditional scholarly publications such as white papers, electronic journals, conference proceedings, and academic journals despite its limited dependence on original "live" links.

To strengthen our analysis, we triangulated our *Google Scholar* search by using EBSCO's Academic Search Premier (EBSCO) because we felt it was important to anchor our findings in academic journals. All searches were completed by July 30, 2011. Any citation appearing after that date was not reflected in our analysis.

The EBSCO database was used to document the number of times a study was mentioned in peer-reviewed academic journals. EBSCO offers a citation indexing function, which reports the number of times a particular article is cited in other indexed journals. This differed significantly from the method used by Swanson and Barlage because both our target sample and venue for dissemination were much more narrow in scope but we felt that our smaller numbers could be accommodated by the tools within these search engines.

We concluded our analysis of influential studies by triangulating them with citations across information compiled from the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), a digital library sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. ERIC contains education-related sources of all types dating back to 1966. ERIC includes both peer reviewed journal articles and non-peer-reviewed documents, including journal articles, reports released by various types of organizations (e.g., advocacy groups, foundation, government), and papers presented at conferences. ERIC does not catalogue books, however.

Findings

This study attempted to identify important studies, organizations, information sources, people, and to rate their level of influence. In addition to obtaining these expert ratings, we also conducted a series of citation searches to determine the rates at which these works were cited

in the news media and scholarly literature. We begin our presentation of the results with an analysis of the most frequently cited influential studies followed by the findings for the other three categories of influence.

The open-ended format of the questions in the original study by Swanson and Barlage was purposely intended to place as few constraints as possible on the participants' own definitions of "influence" in each of the categories. We chose not to define "influence" agreeing with the original researchers that we would err on the side of allowing each individual expert to decide what these terms meant to them. This approach had the benefit of eliminating the possibility that our own preconceptions might bias the pools generated in each category. This strategy also broadened the prospect that our experts would refer to categories, rather than to narrow them to the specific category we chose. When asking about research studies, for example, our experts listed influential essays and texts that we would not specifically cite as research or original research work contributing to a knowledge base. So despite the fact that we might generally consider the work to be relevant and important philosophically, if they listed it and it was not research, then we had to provide a second category for these studies.

In our study, like in the Swanson and Barlage study, our respondents often cited broader bodies or collections of work rather than individual reports or publications when asked to identify influential studies. They tended to identify influential researchers because the field is quite narrow and because educational researchers in American Indian/Alaska Native education tend to focus on one research path, it is narrower still. These responses will be discussed in depth later as the results are analyzed in each category.

The Leading Studies

Results from the expert surveys on influential studies in Indian education produced a very short list of highly influential studies. Despite mirroring the Swanson and Barlage study in many respects, we also purposely placed minimal constraints on the participants' own definitions of "influence" and "study." We did not, however, limit the responses to the past ten years. Essentially, we chose to allow the expert respondents to decide the time and the terms. This approach yielded a similar benefit of eliminating the possibility that our own preconceptions could bias the responses. We discovered that this approach produced a very diverse set of nominations. We specifically note that some of the nominations are not technically studies or technical reports; both of which would yield specific data-driven findings. Some of the nominations were essays or entire collections of essays.

In the Swanson and Barlage (2006) study, they found that the highest tier of influence to be quite different from each other in a variety constructs. Some nominees, in their study,

conformed to “a conventional understanding of a study as a relatively discrete work taking the form of a clearly identifiable core product like a report, monograph, or commissioned proceedings” (p. 9). In our study, we found that our experts, like theirs, did not limit themselves to this strict definition. We found that our respondents more often cited broader bodies or collections, however contextually this differed from the original study. Unlike the Swanson and Barlage study which found respondents contextualizing and listing the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) studies or the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) as broader collections, both long-running assessment and trend sets of data collected for making policy decisions by the federal government, our respondents listed the bodies of work by Demmert² or Mihesuah³ rather than these longitudinal data sets.

We found that our respondents most often listed “The Kennedy Report” published in 1969 as the most influential study. The second highest reported study by our respondents was the Merriam Report of 1928. These two studies ranked higher than more recent studies: Indian Nations at Risk in 1991; the final report of the White House Conference on Indian Education in 1992; and Boyer’s *Tribal Colleges*, in 1989.

Both the Kennedy Report and the Merriam Report represented the most comprehensive look at Indian education at the time; both have had an enduring role in the subsequent legislation and policy changes as Indian education moved from an era of assimilation to self-determination. Unfortunately for Indian tribes, these reports, separated by nearly five decades, have similar recommendations. The conclusion would appear that similar problems remain identified and unsolved. The primary similarity between the two is Collier’s⁴ intention to promote economic rehabilitation as a means to tribal self-governance.

There were a series of political documents or congressional acts were not cited by any of our respondents but which, at the time issued, would have impacted the thinking, direction, and mission of both federal arms of Indian education, specifically the Office of Indian Education Programs in the Department of Education and the Office of Indian Education Programs in the Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs. These documents were noticeably absent from those our respondents listed, but historically there was little doubt that these had a significant

² William (Bill) Demmert, Tlinquit, is best known as the Co-Chair of the national study, Indian Nations At Risk. He is the most prolific published researcher on American Indian issues at this time.

³ Devon Mihesuah’s (Choctaw) work, *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*, as well as her work on stereotypes and identities embedded in colonialism serve as the foundation for other indigenous scholarship.

⁴ John Collier was the Superintendent of Indian Affairs who commissioned the Merriam Report. Congress responded to the Merriam Report by passing the Indian Reorganization Act which was designed to improve tribal economics and strengthen tribal governments.

influence on the two major departments within the federal government with oversight of Indian education. These were not cited because we did not ask for legislation⁵.

In mainstream educational policy, the major research studies commissioned by the Department of Education or Interior would form the basis of subsequent legislation, for example, Public Law 107-110, otherwise known as *No Child Left Behind* is linked to the TIMMS longitudinal study. In Indian education, there does not appear to be such a clear link between research findings and targeted legislation. The legislation, however, does impact Indian education policy. The language in *No Child Left Behind*, for example, was the first federal commitment to education specifically defining education as a trust responsibility.

Influential Organizations

Our study found fifty organizations of influence in American Indian/Alaska Native education policy. These fifty organizations received at least one nomination from experts. Of the fifty organizations, three organizations appeared most often. Table 1 provides key information regarding these organizations.

Table 1: Influential Organizations in American Indian/Alaska Native Education

	National Indian Education Association	American Indian Higher Education Consortium	National Congress of American Indians
History and General Information	Incorporated in 1970, advocates on key policy issues and works towards providing groundbreaking research on indigenous education	Established in 1972, serves member institutions through public policy, advocacy, research, and program initiative	Established in 1944 in response to the termination and assimilation policies of the U.S. government
Location	Washington, DC	Alexandria, VA	Washington, DC
Membership	Educators, students, tribal leaders, organizations, corporations, and legislators	37 tribal colleges and universities serving 27,000 students from 250 tribal nations	Open membership to all American Indian and Alaska Natives
URL	www.niea.org	www.aihec.org	www.ncai.org

⁵ Legislation would have included The Johnson O'Malley Act, as amended, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended, The Indian Elementary and Secondary School Assistance Act in 1968, The Indian Education Act of 1972, The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, as amended, The Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978, as amended, The Native American Languages Act of 1990, The Goals 200: Educate America Act.

The most influential organizations in Indian education policy were non-profit organizations. It is interesting to note that neither the Department of Education's Office of Indian Education Programs or the Bureau of Indian Education, both largely responsible for financing Indian education, were included in participants' responses as influential organizations.

Swanson and Barlage's (2006) national study found one hundred and nine influential organizations and only four organizations made both their list and our list. These included: The Carnegie Corporation, the W.W. Kellogg Foundation, the National Education Association, and The U.S. Congress. Both the National Education Association and the U.S. Congress were categories as Most Influential in their study (p.97). Based on the respondents of our study, none of those four can be considered Most Influential.

In our study, other than professional organizations, universities were listed most often. The universities nominated as influential are included as follows in Table 2.

Table 2: Influential Universities as Organizations in American Indian/Alaska Native Education

University	Location
Arizona State University	Tempe, AZ
Haskell Indian Nations University	Lawrence, KS
Northern Arizona University	Flagstaff, AZ
The Pennsylvania State University	State College, PA
The University of New Mexico	Albuquerque, NM
Western Washington University	Bellingham, WA

These universities had multiple nominations, but the list is presented as alphabetical because there were not a significant number of nominations to presume a ranking. Universities can also be found as a subcategory of Sources of Information in this study. Both Haskell and Penn State can be found on the list generated as a source of information and here, as a professional organization. The Penn State University's American Indian Leadership Program (AILP) is the oldest, most successful producer of graduates in Masters and Doctoral studies in education administration. Founded in 1970, the program continues to recruit and produce graduates with a matriculation rate of 97%. To further illustrate the influence a single institution can exert upon AI/AN education, consider the fact that Penn State graduates are known throughout Indian Country as the Penn State "mafia" because its graduates have controlled Indian education research and field leadership almost from its inception (Warner and Briscoe, 2012).

Influential Information Sources

Our study found sixty-three sources of information that received at least one nomination from the expert respondents. The sources most commonly cited were the *Journal of American Indian Education* published by the Center for Indian Education at Arizona State University and *The Tribal College Journal* published by the American Indian Higher Education Consortium in Alexandria, Virginia.

Three sources of information were found in both this study and the Swanson and Barlage study. The U.S. Department of Education, *The Washington Post* and *The Harvard Educational Review* were nominated by our panel of experts and were also nominated in the original study. *The Washington Post* and the U.S. Department of Education were categorized as most influential in the Swanson and Barlage study; however, none of these three were cited as most influential in our study of information sources. The three do not appear on our list as most influential informal sources because they did not rank high enough from our experts' perspectives even though they did receive nominations.

Our study found Internet websites submitted as influential more often than the Swanson and Barlage study. Daily and weekly newspapers were also nominated as important sources of information on AI/AN education. Daily print newspapers include both regional newsprint and national news media; they also represent both daily and weekly distribution lists. Most educators currently use Internet news sources, rather than print news sources, because of their availability particularly for our sample. The following influential sources of information, including websites and print newspapers had multiple nominations and are listed alphabetically in Table 3.

Table 3: Influential Sources of Information for American Indian/Alaska Native Education

Most influential sources of information	Influential websites as sources of information	Influential print media and newspapers
Journal of American Indian Education Tribal College Journal	American Indian Higher Education Consortium: www.aihec.org Alaska Native Knowledge Network: http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/ ERIC resources: www.eric.gov National Indian Education Association: www.niea.org www.indianz.com	The Gallup Independent Heartbeat Alaska Indian Country Today Lakota Times Navajo Times Indian Country Today Washington Post

Multiple universities were cross-listed as both influential organizations as well as influential sources of information; however some universities were solely nominated as sources of information. Haskell was the only tribal college listed as a primary source of information. Haskell distributes the oldest, continuously published native student newspaper, *The Indian Leader*, however, the nominators were not asked to designate a specific forum. Haskell as a source of information may refer to the extensive network of contacts and alumni as the result of being the oldest, continuously operated federal Indian school in the nation. In 2009, Haskell Indian Nations commemorated a milestone of 125 years of continuous service to Indian education.

Federal agencies and offices were also included as influential sources of information. Nominated universities and federal agencies and offices which had multiple nominations in this category are listed alphabetically in Table 4.

Table 4: Influential Universities and Federal agencies and/or offices as sources of information in AI/AN Education

Influential universities as sources of information	Influential federal agencies and offices as sources of information
Haskell Indian Nations University Harvard University The Pennsylvania State University Stanford University The University of California-Los Angeles (American Indian Studies Center) The University of Oklahoma	Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Education Department of Education, Office of Indian Education Mid-Continent Regional Education Lab (MCREL) Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL).

We have only chosen to include the top ranked nominations here. The one significant difference between this study and the Swanson and Barlage study on influence was the acknowledgement that “word of mouth,” commonly referred to in Indian Country as the “moccasin telegraph” was a source of information.

Influential People

We chose to list all of the individuals who were named as influential by multiple respondents without a rank order. We chose to do this because within Indian education there may be found special areas of expertise or insight, but the names you find here are those who you will find in the reference list of many of the influential studies listed earlier in this study. Also, we value the contributions of each of these educators and our study’s underpinnings of indigenous values would negate a ranking of the type found in the Swanson and Barlage work. We decided, instead, to provide the following table that highlights the type of work for which these educators are recognized.

The respondents listed 117 different individuals and because of space limitations we decided to include only those who appeared on multiple lists. The maximum range of multiple

nominations was fourteen. Table 5 lists the most influential people in American Indian/Alaska Native education.

Table 5: Influential People in American Indian/Alaska Native Education

Professors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barnhardt, Ray • Beaulieu, David (White Earth Ojibwe) • Christensen, Rosemary (Wisconsin Lake Superior Band of Ojibwe) • Cajete, Gregory (Santa Clara Pueblo) • Charleston, Mike (Cherokee) • Deer, Ada (Menominee) • Deloria, Vine (Standing Rock Sioux) • Demmert, William (Tlingit) • Havinghurst, Robert • Kawagly, Oscar (Yupik) • Fox, Mary Jo Tippeconnic (Comanche) • Lomawaima, K. Tsaina • Noley, Grayson (Choctaw) • Pretty on Top Pease Windy Boy, Janine (Crow) • Pewewardy, Cornel (Comanche) • Rehyner, Jon • St. Germaine, Rick (Ojibwe) • Tijerina, Kathryn Harris (Comanche) • Tippeconnic, John (Comanche) • Warner, Linda Sue (Comanche)
Tribal College Administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Billy, Carrie (Navajo) • Bordeaux, Lionel (Rosebud Sioux) • Comeau, Karen Gayton Swisher (Standing Rock) • Gipp, David (Standing Rock Sioux) • Gipp, Gerald E. (Standing Rock Sioux) • Robert Gipp (Standing Rock Sioux) • Mann, Henrietta (Cheyenne) • Risling, David (Hoopa) • Shanley, James (Assiniboine)
K-12 Administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bordeaux, Roger (Lakota) • Bull, Adam (Choctaw)
Political figures and federal employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinton, William • Collier, John • Dorgan, Byron • Felix, Angelita (Three Affiliated) • Fox, Sandra (Oglala Lakota) • Grover, Kevin (Pawnee) • Inouye, Daniel (Native Hawaiian) • Kennedy, Ted • Kennedy, Robert • Kildee, Dale • Lovesee, Alan • Mankiller, Wilma (Western Cherokee) • Merriam, Lewis • Nixon, Richard • Reagan, Ronald • Thompson, Morris (Athabaskan) • Zah, Peterson (Navajo)
Organizational representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Butterfield, Robyn (Winnebago) • Hill, Norbert (Oneida) • Monette, Carty (Turtle Mountain Chippewa) • Tonemah, Stuart (Kiowa) • Taylor, Carmen (Salish Kootenai/Oneida)

The Swanson and Barlage study found thirteen individuals of significant influence who had varied roles, backgrounds, and institutions. Our list, like theirs, found individuals who frequently changed institutional affiliation and the general grouping we have made is for descriptive purposes only; in fact by the time this is published, some individuals will have changed categories in Table 5. Some may have retired. In the original study, the single most influential individual in American education policy was Bill Gates; he was not mentioned by any of our respondents. The study asked for individual nominations; however members of the same family often made the same list. For example, Gerald E. Gipp, Robert Gipp and David Gipp (Standing Rock Sioux) are brothers. We did not ask for tribal affiliations; however the influence of a few tribes is evident. Table 5 reflects multiple tribal members from The Comanche Tribe of Oklahoma, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and the Oneida Nation.

Influence as Positive or Negative

The only organizational specifically listed by respondents as a negative influence on Indian Education policy was the Bureau of Indian Affairs. We did not ask respondents to indicate positive or negative influence and most respondents did not; however, we are including this notation because it is significant that educators would note the Bureau of Indian Affairs, now Bureau of Indian Education, as a negative influence in such singular fashion. We believe this is significant also because it was information that was not requested; the original survey specifically asked for organizations with influence. We did not suggest influence as a “positive” or “negative” attribute. We had multiple respondents who specifically commented on the negative influence of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Discussion: The Anatomy of Influence

The purpose of this study was to try to, in modified fashion, duplicate the 2006 Swanson and Barlage study, *Influence: A Study of the Factors Shaping Education Policy* within the context of American Indian and Alaska Native education reflecting the perspectives of indigenous leaders. Swanson and Barlage approached the anatomy of influence by presenting “a summary of results from in-depth analyses conducted to assess the characteristics of influential studies from a quantitative perspective” (p. 23). Our study revealed a far more qualitative anatomy in that the types and numbers of nominations were not easily categorized by “type of study, date of release, sponsor or institution releasing the study, length of document...[or] accounting of the substantive topics addressed” (p. 23). Rather, our study

indicated a strong participant reliance and belief that the most influential studies, organizations, sources of information, and people can be found within the narrow field of American Indian/Alaska Native education and research. Current American Indian scholars link research and practice in native ways of knowing to critical change in both policy and practice.

Perhaps this finding can be traced back some of the original influential studies such as the Kennedy (1969) and Merriam (1928) reports which, while separated by 50 years, show little improvement or willingness by legislators and non-native educators to act on recommendations that might improve education for indigenous people. Even today, as tribes have evolved from forced assimilation to self-determination, there appears to be little support nationally for promoting economic rehabilitation as a means of supporting tribal self-governance. American Indian and Alaska Native people appear to recognize this and look inward to their own experts to determine what is best for their students.

Conclusion: For Our Children

Indian education policy is multi-faceted and is a complex accumulation of layers from eras defined by assimilation, termination, and self-determination. Pratt's original policy to "kill the Indian, save the man", a distinct assimilation approach, dominated Indian education for decades (Churchill, 2004). The legacy of the boarding school's mission, to eradicate all traces of original AI/AN cultural affiliation, underpins our current challenges (Cohen, 1953). Indian education for the students in our schools today and for those in the future should represent the best opportunities our tribes and this nation can envision. Understanding our policies, supporting those who work to create healthier schools, and teaching and mentoring our students to take the place of these educators represent our best hope.

It is the expressed intent that this study might begin a critical conversation about the education of American Indian and Alaskan Native students that would not only include them in the broader context of American education, but also provide insight into the people themselves; what they value, who they trust, and what is most influential and important to them in terms of the future of their children. The dearth of literature in this field is evidence enough that more can be done to meet the needs of this diverse and unique set of students.

The immediate conversation for educational policymakers in general and AI/AN specifically is one about the utility of high-stakes testing. Additionally, AI/AN educators need to create policies that foster the use of native ways of knowing in public and Bureau of Indian Affairs schools. Policies framed by non-Indians in public school boards or by state and national legislation rarely address the specific needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Tribal

school and tribal school board associations have a responsibility to ensure that local policies reflect local cultures and traditions. They also have a responsibility to encourage parental activity in public schools, including responses to proposed national policy. Each of the influential individuals or organizations in our study has a responsibility to move beyond the acquiescence of mainstream educational policy. It is imperative that these influentials use the tools available to create public policy to strengthen the resources for American Indian/Alaska Native students.

As we look towards the future of American Indian and Alaskan Native people, it is our hope that our study will provide educators and scholars alike a snapshot of the state of influence in both policy and practice and will provide a catalyst for researchers beginning their careers. Finally, we propose the use of research as a tool for activism in changing the lives of AI/AN students. The “influentials” continue to work to create better opportunities For Our Children.

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