

## Introduction

All we know is what our teachers and experiences have taught us. Our way of life is passed down to each new generation. This is done today by family members, elders and other teachers in and out of our schools. As they age each new generation moves over time from being learners to becoming teachers as well. Our teachers deserve to be honored and respected for their knowledge and work. This monograph, *Honoring Our Teachers*, includes presentations at the seventh American Indian / Indigenous Teacher Education Conference (AIITEC) held at Northern Arizona University on June 16-18, 2016. *Honoring Our Teachers* is the fourth in a series of “Honoring” monographs that began in 2011 with *Honoring Our Heritage* and was followed by *Honoring Our Children* in 2013 and *Honoring Our Elders* in 2015, all of which were published on-line and in paperback by Northern Arizona University’s College of Education and focus on culturally appropriate approaches for teaching Indigenous students. These monographs are designed to contribute to the ongoing professional development efforts that educational administrators and teachers need in order to continuously improve their schools and teaching.

A theme repeated by the contributors to this monograph is that teachers need to be treated with respect as professionals and not de-skilled by being forced to sign fidelity oaths that make them adhere to “evidence based” one-size-fits-all scripted curriculums that usually lack a solid research base as indicated by the U.S. Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse,<sup>1</sup> and even when they do show a fairly solid research base, that research does not include a focus on how American Indian and other ethnic minority students perform using the mandated curriculum materials. It is relatively easy for teachers to just follow the scripted teachers’ editions of textbooks, but the result will too often be more disengaged students, more discipline problems, lower test scores and higher drop out rates.

### The 2016 Keynotes

The first two chapters of *Honoring Our Teachers* are adapted from keynote speeches delivered at the 2016 AIITEC conference. Sharon Nelson-Barber shares her insights about how current educational reform efforts in the United States are affecting Indigenous education in “The ‘Perfect Storm’ in Indigenous Education: Stories about Context, Culture and Community Knowledge.” She expresses her concern about “many teachers’ lack of experiential knowledge about the home and community lives of their students” and highlights their need to focus “on the strengths and competencies children” bring to school from their homes and communities (p. 3). She finds that “teachers must... be masterful in the ways they draw on local knowledge and thinking as they tailor [curricular] content, make use of local vernacular and build relationships with students” (p. 4). Then Tiffany S. Lee describes the limitations of formal classroom education in “In School I

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Learn from A to H, but the World is A to Z': Promoting Educational Relevance, Equity, and Sovereignty through Community-engaged Learning." Lee emphasizes the importance of teachers learning that students need "to be engaged in active ways if we want them to connect and learn" (p. 9) and describes the importance of Community Engaged Learning and Community-Based Education to counter unsuccessful "one-size-fits-all approaches in education, such as nationally promoted scripted curriculum or teaching methods" that have "permeated American public schools" (p. 11).

### **Improving Indigenous Education**

In the next section the contributors focus on what is needed to improve Indigenous education and close the historical academic achievement gap that has hindered the progress of many American Indian and other Indigenous students. First, Joseph Martin, Richard Manning, Larry Steeves, Josephine Steeves and Jon Reyhner present the results of interviews with experienced indigenous educators in "What Educational Leaders See as Important for Improving the Education of Indigenous Youth." They first look at landmark studies of what educators have learned from teaching Indigenous students by Linda Cleary and Thomas Peacock (1998) and Terry Huffman (2013) and then report the findings of their own recent interviews with experienced Indigenous educational leaders that point to the need for school administrators and teachers to know about the communities where they work and to build relationships with those communities, including for teachers to get to know the parents and extended families of their students and to move away from textbook and lecture teaching methods to a more hands-on and engaging instructional approach. Then Larry Steeves and Sheila Carr-Stewart discuss a conceptual framework for improving Indigenous student learning outcomes. They review mostly Canadian research on the importance of parent, community and student engagement and the importance of teachers building relationships with their students and using culturally relevant pedagogy.

Next, Jonathan Anuik and Laura-Lee Kearns describe Métis and Ontario education policy that supports Métis holistic lifelong learning and the importance of schools recognizing Métis as a people and to value their identities and histories. Closing this section, Keiki Kawai'ae'a, Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley and Kaiolohia Masaoka describe Kaiolohia's experiences as a first year teacher in a Hawaiian language immersion school. Kaiolohia writes how she observed many of her co-workers and the relationships that they formed with their students and how she enrolled in a language arts enrichment class during the summer to further improve her teaching repertoire. In addition, she describes how she learned from her students as well as taught them. A parent found that the success of the immersion school Kaiolohia taught in was built around the Hawaiian concept of aloha that is built around a "wholeness of mind, body and soul and connectedness to the universe" (p. 92). Kaiolohia found that teachers must be humbler than the children and that they are not just students, "but your own children and children of your friends and family" (p. 96). She also discovered that curricular content

needed to be interconnected, rather than mathematics, science, and other subjects being taught as separate, segregated subjects.

### **Literacy**

The third group of essays focus on literacy with George Ann Gregory and Freddie Bowles presenting arguments for Indigenous literacy and then Margaret Vaughn, Kelly Hillman, Traci McKarcher and Cindy Latella describing their action research project on Indigenous student literacy practices. Gregory and Bowles write how colonialism has created an identity crisis among colonized people and the need to utilize literacy in the heritage languages of the students' communities to promote decolonization in order to help resolve that identity crisis. They go on to document successful bilingual programs that promoted Native language literacy. Then Margaret Vaughn and three of her college students reflect on how, as teachers, these students worked to engage their elementary school students by using culturally relevant reading materials with them that were not otherwise available in their schools.

### **History and Research**

The fourth group of essays focuses on Indigenous educational history and research. George Ann Gregory discusses "Legacies of Colonialism: The Education of Maya in Belize." She describes the lingering effects of colonialism in Belize that exploits and displaces the Mayan people and made makes second class citizens receiving a second class education. She emphasizes the importance of improving the educational system so that Mayan identity is valued and teachers are prepared to provide Mayan students bilingual education. Then Tom Hopkins shares some of his experiences with English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching efforts, bilingual education and testing as a longtime employee of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs in "A History of American Indian and Alaska Native Education: 1964-1970." He describes his involvement in Bureau Indian Affairs (BIA) education, including his work with BIA professional development for teachers and how the BIA's area director organization during this period worked against efforts to improve teaching in BIA schools by often excluding curricular reforms designed to utilize local research that focused on Navajo and other Indian students. Of special interest is his work with the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) organization, the Navajo Reading Study project and his comments on the founding of Rough Rock Demonstration School, the first locally controlled BIA school, in 1966.

Next, Adam Murray discusses the type of research that is needed for evidence-based support of culturally responsive education in "Culturally Responsive Education: The Need and Methods for Demonstrating Effectiveness for Evidenced-based Practices." He reviews the history of and research on Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) and summarizes the type of evidence based research designs that could help win political and popular support for CRE. Closing out this section Naatosi Fish and Mizuki Miyashita present their research on guiding pronunciation of Blackfoot melodies. They provide an example of how a com-

munity member can partner with a university linguist to do research on “word melody,” which can help students wanting to learn a Native-like pronunciation of their heritage language.

### **Conclusion**

Together, the contributors to this volume make a strong case for the importance of providing Indigenous students with a culturally appropriate education that builds on their cultural and experiential backgrounds. Teacher preparation programs need to ensure teacher education candidates are aware of how important it is to learn about the homes and communities that their students come from and return to as well as becoming subject matter experts and developing their instructional expertise. In addition, these aspiring teachers need to recognize the importance of their remaining lifelong learners through continued professional development. In return, we all need to honor teachers for their dedicated efforts to educate our children and thus empower them as family members and tribal and global citizens.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences’ What Works Clearinghouse at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/WWC/>

### **References**

- Cleary, L. M., & Peacock, T. D. (1998). *Collected wisdom: American Indian education*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Huffman, T. (2013). *American Indian educators in reservation schools*. Reno: University of Nevada Press.