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Culturally relevant teaching has been a hot topic word in the world of education for many years. However, for the Lumbee Tribe, best practices for working with American Indian students are frequently based on studies done with Southwestern tribes. This dissertation presents the stories of twelve Lumbee Tribal young adults and their kindergarten through twelfth grade educational experience. Through their stories, I explored the barriers they faced as well as the successes they achieved. I also explored the ties between the students' Lumbee tribal culture and their success within the classroom. Data for this study was collected through face-to-face interviews with the participants as well as a focus group.

The stories told throughout this study suggested that Lumbee tribal students found support through various aspects of Lumbee tribal culture, one of those being the power of relationships with American Indian and non-American educators and community members. This work also suggested that there is a lack of cultural understanding and knowledge as it relates to Lumbee culture within the classroom thus giving birth to stereotypes that damage the positive identity development of Lumbee tribal students attending schools with low populations of Lumbee students. Thus, suggesting an increased need of cultural integration within the curriculum as well as a need for educator understanding as it relates to the culture of Lumbee tribal students.

HEALING: THE STORIES OF ACADEMIC SUCCESSES AND BARRIERS  
FACED BY LUMBEE TRIBAL YOUNG ADULTS

by

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Approved by

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## DEDICATION

To my family and friends, for all of your eternal love, support and prayer.

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To my sisters, you truly make my heart overflow. Your constant love and support has been my backbone. Thank you eternally.

To my family, after years and years and years of your love and support and concern, I can finally say that I have accomplished the goal that I set out to achieve. Only with your continued love have I been able to accomplish this.

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## CHAPTER I

### MY PEOPLE

Her story is reminiscent of wings being carelessly snatched off a graceful butterfly, a story known all too well within the Lumbee community. Her voice had been light, fluid, passionate, and her eyes the color of freshly grown grass. As she approached me, her smile was forced and her sparkle now timid. “Miss Leslie, I can’t do it, I can’t go to college.” There is no sound that can be equated to that of a breaking heart. My response was strong, emblazoned, and forceful “Yes you can.” Our conversation ebbed and flowed through all of the barriers that she had faced. Her story began to take the form that I knew all too well. It was my story, my brother’s story, my cousin’s story, my tribe’s story. She faced an insurmountable wall of disappointment, setbacks, and failures. It was a wall that is rarely overcome and even worse, a wall that is often made invisible. I seek to hear the voices of Lumbee tribal young adults, to document their stories and, most importantly, to share their tribulations along with their trials.

Presented here are the stories of 12 Lumbee tribal young adults ages 18-26. Through this work I sought to understand their educational experiences in the K-12 public educational system while also seeking to learn more about their barriers as well as well as their successes. My work with the Lumbee tribal young adults was guided by the following questions:

- What are the educational experiences of Lumbee young adults ages 18-26?
- What educational barriers do Lumbee young adults face?
- What strategies have Lumbee young adults used to overcome educational barriers?
- What educational successes have Lumbee young adults celebrated?
- What helped facilitate those successes?

While this work presents the unique story of each participant as well as information about their educational experiences, the Lumbee young adults also shared information about a crucial part of their identity, being Lumbee.

Throughout this work, one thing rings true, the stories of Lumbee young adults are unique and often unheard in today's academic world. Thus, the presentation of this research will remain true to the unique perspectives of Lumbee young adults. My writing for this work finds its roots in the oral storytelling and narrative history of our people and our favored communication style. Weaving in imagery with the passionate tone of the Lumbee dialect, I have but one goal, remain true to who we are and present the story of the Lumbee young adults in its purest form.

In the upcoming pages, the reader will explore information related to the land of the Lumbee, terminology as well as my positionality as a Lumbee researcher and writer.

### **The Land of the Lumbee**

Sheltered by vast fields, gigantic pine trees, and cow pastures, the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina finds its tribal headquarters in Pembroke, North Carolina. Though

centrally located in Robeson County (the largest county in North Carolina, (Blu, 1980, p. 9)), members of the Lumbee Tribe also call Cumberland County, Hoke County, and Scotland County home. One of 8 state recognized tribes in North Carolina, the Lumbee Tribe has a history that has sustained the people of the tribe and now stands as the largest tribe east of the Mississippi River. With over 50,000 enrolled members, tribal members are well known for their thick accents, their Lumbee lingo, their annual Lumbee Homecoming celebration, and their collard sandwiches (collards delicately placed between two pieces of crisp fried corn bread, topped with fat back). Negotiating our space as a cultural and political entity, the political efforts to seek full federal recognition have long evaded the Lumbee people. Federal recognition as defined by the National Congress of American Indians (n.d) is,

official acknowledgement by the United States of the political status of that tribe as a government. Members of a federally recognized tribe are eligible for a number of unique federal programs, including those offered for Indian people by the Indian Health Service (p. 4).

Recognized but “withholding all privileges and benefits normally associated with recognition” (Lumbee Tribe FAQs, n.d), the Lumbee Act of 1956 was the closest the Lumbee people have come to the goal of obtaining federal recognition. Worth presenting in its entirety, the final sentence presented in the Lumbee Act of 1956, italicized below, has continually blocked the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina from essential federal benefits. The Lumbee Act of 1956, also known as the Lumbee Recognition Act reads,

Whereas many Indians now living in Robeson and adjoining counties are descendants of that once large and prosperous tribe which occupied the lands

along the Lumbee River at the time of the earliest white settlements in that section; and

Whereas at the time of their first contacts with the colonists, these Indians were a well-established and distinctive people living in European-type houses in settled towns and communities, owning slaves and livestock, tilling the soil, and practicing many of the arts and crafts of European civilization; and Whereas by reason of tribal legend, coupled with a distinctive appearance and manner of speech and the frequent recurrence among them of family names such as Oxendine, Locklear, Chavis, Drinkwater, Bullard, Lowery, Sampson, and others, also found on the roster of the earliest English settlements, these Indians may, with considerable show of reason, trace their origin to an admixture of colonial blood with certain coastal tribes of Indians; and Whereas these people are naturally and understandably proud of their heritage, and desirous of establishing their social status and preserving their racial history: Now, therefore, Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Indians now residing in Robeson and adjoining counties of North Carolina, originally found by the first white settlers on the Lumbee River in Robeson County, and claiming joint descent from remnants of early American colonists and certain tribes of Indians originally inhabiting the coastal regions of North Carolina, shall, from and after the ratification of this Act, be known and designated as Lumbee Indians of North Carolina and shall continue to enjoy all rights, privileges, and immunities enjoyed by them as citizens of the State of North Carolina and of the United States as they enjoyed before the enactment of this Act, and shall continue to be subject to all the obligations and duties of such citizens under the laws of the State of North Carolina and the United States. *Nothing in this act shall make such Indians eligible for any services performed by the United States for Indians because of their status as Indians, and none of the statutes of the United States which affect Indians because of their status as Indians shall be applicable to the Lumbee Indians.* Section 2. All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are hereby repealed. Approved, June 7, 1956. (Dial, 1975, p. 186-187, emphasis added)

Composed of primarily rural country, the story of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina is reminiscent of many other American Indian tribes. Tainted with a history of drug and alcohol addiction, the related statistics frequently presented often comprise outsiders' defining story of the tribe. However, the story of the Lumbee Tribe is so much more. The Lumbee Tribe reopened their tribal cultural grounds for the first time in nearly

10 years for the 2016 annual “Dance of the Spring Moon” powwow. Bringing in one of the largest crowds it has seen in years, the reopening not only provided an opportunity to regain access to lands overrun and unused, it also provided an opportunity for community involvement and cultural revitalization. The Lumbee Tribe also boasts seven “Boys and Girls Club” centers that facilitate after-school care, tutoring services and an array of cultural activities. Providing financial help to first time homeowners, veteran services as well as rehabilitation services, the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina has worked to forefront the needs of its tribal members. Though working diligently to regain the cultural assets that served as a critical source of strength to their ancestors, Lumbee Tribal youth, like all American Indian youth across the country, face a substantial number of barriers.

American Indian students in the United States face a mountain of educational and health statistics that consistently tell them they are destined to fail. Representing 1.1% of the public-school student population (2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection, 2016), American Indian students are retained at disproportionately higher rates, more likely to be absent than their white peers and attend schools with higher concentrations of inexperienced teachers (2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection, 2016). American Indian students have a graduation rate of 69% compared to 83% of their white counterparts (Statistics on Native Students, n.d.). The dropout rate of American Indian students also frequently persists in being higher than other racial groups (Klug & Whitfield, 2003; Powers et al, 2003, p. 17). In 2009, American Indian students had a dropout rate of 13% compared to the national rate of 8% (Statistics on Native Students,

n.d.). In the state of North Carolina, home to seven state recognized tribes and one federally recognized tribe as well as the largest tribe east of the Mississippi River, American Indian students frequently underperform on all standardized tests in comparison to their white peers (2015 North Carolina Report Card). The Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, the chosen focus of my research, is located primarily in the Robeson, Hoke, Cumberland, and Scotland Counties and also reflects the academic story of American Indian students from across the state. While demographic data reflected on various websites paints a picture of all American Indian students within these counties, a vast majority of the students are members of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. While state proficiency on End-Of-Course testing in the state of North Carolina stands at 57.9%, proficiency for American Indian students (primarily Lumbee) in Robeson, Hoke, Cumberland and Scotland counties stands at 36.6%, 36.1%, 49.5% and 46.1% respectively (North Carolina School Report Card, 2014-2015).

The disparities also extend to the economic and health realm. In 2011, 33% of American Indian students lived in poverty compared to 12% of whites (Statistics on Native Students, n.d.). The American Indian population also deals with health disparities such as alcoholism and diabetes at shockingly higher rates than other racial groups (FFF: American Indian and Alaska Heritage Month 2015, 2015). Indian Country today, particularly youth in Indian Country are plagued by a continual increase in suicides. This is the second leading cause of death for American Indian youth who, in comparison to other ethnic minorities, have the highest rates of suicide (Demographics, n.d.). Robeson County, the tribal center for the Lumbee Tribe, has a population of 134,197, 40% of

which identify as American Indian and has homicide and diabetes rates that are two times greater than state rates (2015 State of the County Health Report; Quick Facts Robeson County NC, United States Census Bureau).

Various research studies conducted to learn more about the educational successes and barriers faced by American Indian students often focus broadly on the American Indian population as a whole or on southwestern tribes. While there are themes that run throughout Indian Country “all knowledge cannot necessarily be universal in its application because of the importance of place, space, and context” (Brayboy, 2009, p. 10). Thus, my desire to focus solely on the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina seeks to both fill a void in current literature while also seeking to provide perspective and information to educators and tribal members within my community. The information typically afforded to the general public concerning the educational stories of American Indian students is also often deficit based. By only fore fronting the atrocities faced and presenting the barriers as insurmountable mountains, this deficit view renders the successes and strengths within our tribal communities’ invisible. This research allowed me to gather information concerning the educational successes and barriers of Lumbee Tribal young adults. This research is a solid foundation towards the decolonization of our public educational system in hopes of inspiring change that will work to support and encourage Lumbee tribal students.

## Terminology

To those unfamiliar with the American Indian population in the United States of America, varied terminology can often be confusing. Here I seek to provide clarification for terms that I plan to use throughout this work.

- *American Indian*: The term American Indian is often synonymous with Native American and Indian. Throughout the context of his work, American Indian will be used to refer to those that self-identify as the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The term American Indian was chosen not as a point of preference but because of the use of the term, American Indian, with most federal reporting's and documentation. It is the referenced federal terminology.
- *Tribal Sovereignty*: The National Congress of American Indians (n.d) defines tribal sovereignty as the powers retained by tribes and not expressly taken away by Congress and could include the regulation of tribal land, taxes, zoning, resources, the conduct of tribal members as well as the jurisdiction of non-members (p. 5).
- *Indian Country*: A commonly used phrase amongst the American Indian population, Indian Country is used throughout this work to refer to the tribal lands that American Indian nations call home in the United States of America. This term is not exclusively used to refer to federally recognized reservations but here

will be used to refer to all communities, areas, and reservations that American Indian Nations call home.

- *Colonization*: an ongoing process “colonization has come to mean any kind of external control, and it is used as an expression for the subordination of Indian peoples and their rights since early contact with Europeans” (Champagne, 2016). Within the context of this work, colonization will pertain to the domination of the American Indian population and traditional tribal lands belonging to those nations by European settlers.
- *Decolonization*: “decolonizing essentially means to start *thinking like an Indian*” (Moore & Taylor, 2014), a process that involves the removal of colonizing forces from physical as well as mental spaces of American Indian nations.
- *Indian Education*: “Funded through the U.S. Department of Education, Indian Education Formula Grant (Title VII) programs support the efforts of school districts, Indian tribes and organizations, postsecondary institutions, and other entities to meet the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students so that they can meet the same challenging state academic standards as all other students.” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction American Indian Education, n.d.). Throughout this work, participants along with myself often refer to the grant-funded program as “Indian Education”. Robeson, Hoke, Scotland, and Cumberland County school districts are all recipients of this grant program with the Public Schools of Robeson County being one of the largest grant recipients in the nation. Indian

Education varies in its daily operational offerings in each county. Broadly the program hires personnel that visit schools with American Indian students and works to support them academically while also providing various extracurricular opportunities such as college visits and American Indian student groups.

### **Positionality**

With the temperature reaching approximately 87 degrees, windows down and my favorite song on the radio, I scan the landscape and in an instant a smile graces my face, hiding the forlorn stress and anxiety that had once been present moments before. It's planting season. I slow down and creep behind the tractor in front of me, a farmer making his way to his crops at a sluggish but steady pace. To the right of me, acres upon acres upon acres of beans have been planted to soak up the summer sun while to the right of me; a field of corn is beginning to sprout. Corn, my favorite crop, is my time teller. Coming home from Chapel Hill in May meant that I got to witness the first sprouts of corn find their way. A trip home in June meant that the cornstalks near our house were healthily growing and slowing making it harder to see across the field. By July, returning home meant that I had to drive slowly and carefully down our old country road or I would surely miss my turn. The baby corn had turned into giant corn stalk-like trees and quickly let me know that I had been gone too long. It was time for me to come home.

My decision to work with the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina is not only initiated by the apparent lack of literature related to Lumbee tribal youth but is directly connected to the fact that I myself am an enrolled member of the Lumbee Tribe of North

Carolina. My relation to this work is personal, heartfelt and passionate. Born and raised in Hoke County, NC, approximately 20 minutes from the Lumbee Tribal center, the first time I heard the name of my tribal nation mentioned at school was my senior year in a self-selected American Indian Studies elective course. For years I had attended cultural classes, powwows, and the annual Lumbee Homecoming celebration outside of school, but not once had I questioned why my people were never discussed in the classroom. “You can choose absolutely any topic,” said Miss Carter, referring to our senior project, the culminating work of our academic career as high school students. With rotten behavior, I was considered a mediocre student despite my superb grades and chose to complete my project on the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. For the first time in my schooling experience I was completely enthralled in my work. Constantly researching the history of my tribe, working with a local elder to design and complete my first regalia (traditional American Indian clothing) and wrangling together American Indian students to revive the Native American Student Association (NASA), I found my purpose. Revisiting this story eight years later, I wonder what my schooling experience would have been like had I been given the opportunity to explore my identity, discuss my tribe, and share my barriers as well as my successes with those around me. I recall close friends whom I witnessed fall victim to drugs, alcohol, teen pregnancy, truancy, and domestic violence among other things. More powerfully, I have stories of friends who overcame, graduated, pursued graduate degrees, became successful businessmen and women, and phenomenal parents. And yet our stories are hidden. Forced to continue to function in a system that neither recognizes our barriers or celebrates our successes, this

work, for me, is about telling a story that has the power to reshape the way we view Lumbee tribal youth. This work gives me the unique opportunity to share the voices of Lumbee tribal young adults who have found their way in an educational system that rebukes our cultural ways of being, seeks to reform our Lumbee dialect, and renders us imaginary in all aspects of the word.

In forthcoming chapters, literature related to the topic will be discussed in depth in chapter two. Chapter three discusses the methodology used for this study. Chapters four and five present the findings of this work in depth and the concluding chapter, chapter six, provides implications for future work as related to Lumbee tribal students.

CHAPTER II  
ASSIMILATION, DECOLONIZATION, AND REVITALIZATION:  
THE LITERATURE AND THEORY

American Indian nations have a relationship with the educational realm that often muddies the lines of assimilation, self-determination, and tribal sovereignty. The following literature review seeks to provide insight into the historical relationship of American Indians and the institution of education by discussing the historical experiences of American Indians, specifically the Lumbee, as it relates to education as well as current educational frameworks and theories related to American Indians.

**“Kill the Indian, Save the Man”**

The educational success and barriers of American Indians have found themselves enthralled in a history that prides itself on its ability to demolish the culture of those who fall outside the lines of Western expectations. The assimilation of American Indian tribal nations has found its home in the realm of education.

Robbed of their “right to be Indigenous” (Grande, 2015, p. 15), the miseducation of American Indians proved to be colonizers systematic attempt to rid the world of American Indian culture. Attempts to civilize were intertwined with attempts to Christianize (Grande, 2015, p. 4), originating with mission schools run by French Jesuits in 1611 (Grande, 2015, p. 15). Established to assimilate and civilize, the work of the mission schools found its materialization in various forms, one being that of off-reservation boarding schools.

Though their origination is contested in various locations, some state they originated in 1754 (Klein, 2014), while others place the first boarding school on the Yakama Indian Reservation in 1860 (American Indian Relief Council); their impact is something that is clearly evident. The primary purpose of boarding schools for the American Indian population was assimilation. Children were removed from their homes and communities as a means of disconnecting them from their families, culture and traditions (Klein, 2014). Boarding and mission schools became federally supported in 1819 with the passage of the Indian Civilization Fund Act which authorized up to \$10,000 a year to “support the effort of religious groups and interested individuals willing to live among and teach Indians” (Reyhner, n.d.). This act supported the establishment of various religious mission schools who supported the premise of assimilation. Though not the first attempts at assimilation, the passage of this federal act allowed various religious organizations to play a more active role in the direct assimilation and Christianization of the American Indian population. The assimilation and uprising of schools was presented in various forms (off-reservation schools, mission schools, day schools, etc.). The systematic assimilation of the American Indian population in the United States of America comes at the end of years of war, disease, plundering, and genocide. Thus, already depleted, the war on the culture of the American Indians continued.

Each tribe took the acceptance or dismissal of formal education among the American Indian population differently and even more specifically viewed differently by individual members. In a recount of the traumatization of the mission/ boarding schools, Dr. Henrietta Mann, a member of the Cheyenne tribe of Oklahoma, shares the various

stories of elders who refused to send their children to the schools until 1875 and then did so only out of necessity after being forced onto reservations (Mann, 1997). The people of her tribe view education as “practically necessary for twenty first century survival” (Mann, p. 182). Dr. Henrietta Mann (1997) as well as Dr. Amanda Cobb (2000) both recount the oral histories of the mission schools that had a clear goal of assimilation and followed a curriculum that entailed domestic and agricultural duties that were foreign to the cultural ways of their people. With the insurgence of mission school and religious groups, a key part of the school curriculum also included Christian religious activities along with basic academics and manual labor. Though the stories presented by Cobb and Mann are singular experiences, they ring true for many others.

In 1879 the most well-known off-reservation boarding school was opened by Col. Richard Henry Pratt who thought that on-reservation sites did not remove students enough from reservation life (American Indian Relief Council). Founded by Col. Pratt, Carlisle Indian School, located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, ran under Pratt’s motto, “Kill the Indian, Save the Man” (American Indian Relief Council). As the only off-reservation boarding school in the east, Pratt sought to immerse American Indian students into white communities in hopes that they would not want to return to their reservations during the summer (American Indian Relief Council). However, the atrocities against these students began as soon as they arrived at the various boarding schools of this type. The first things to go were any outward appearances that connected them to their culture. Their hair, clothing, and names were all dismissed. Sent to a boarding school in 1945, Bill Wright, a member of the Pattwin tribe, shares his story of arriving at a boarding school in

Nevada at the age of 6 and being bathed in kerosene and his head shaven (American Indian Boarding Schools Haunt Many: NPR). Forbidden from speaking their Native languages, eating traditional foods and or taking part in any ceremonies, students quickly became ostracized from their home communities. Wright shares the story of returning home and informing his grandma that he could no longer understand his language to which she replied, “Then who are you?” (American Indian Boarding Schools Haunt Many: NPR).

Discipline and punishment were key threads throughout the boarding school experience. Often forcibly removed from their homes to attend boarding schools, discipline and regimentation within the schools was stringent. Beaten, malnourished, and forced to partake in manual labor, life at the boarding school was dismal for many American Indian students (American Indian Board Schools Haunt Many: NPR). Wright recounts the misery he faced while at the boarding school in Nevada and connects how the strict discipline has migrated into the family aspect of American Indian communities stating, "You grow up with discipline, but when you grow up and you have families, then what happens? If you're my daughter and you leave your dress out, I'll knock you through that wall. Why? Because I'm taught discipline” (American Indian Boarding School Haunt Many: NPR).

The stories of boarding schools vary across Indian Country. While some recount the dismal conditions, some attribute their success to the boarding school education. Through the stories of 15 women, Cobb (2000) presented the story of Bloomfield Academy at which the women sing praises to the education they received in preparation

of life in the new world that was extremely different from the one faced by their elders and family members. Whether brutally damaging or seemingly positive the lasting effects of American Indian boarding schools left American Indian students disconnected from their families, communities and culture.

The ever-present history of boarding schools and the current condition of the American Indian population in the United States of America have only perpetuated stereotypes that persist and thus damage the identity of American Indian students. Long proclaimed as savages that needed civilizing, American Indians have always been viewed by outsiders from a deficit mindset. This mindset, thus the onset of boarding schools, often positioned educators in the role as a savior. In doing so the culture of the American Indian people was not always viewed favorably and is rarely found within the educational realm.

Sarah Shear, associate professor of social studies education at Pennsylvania State University in Altoona, spent two years studying curriculum and standards to see exactly what students were learning about American Indians (Landry, 2014). According to Shear's findings, 87% of references to American Indians portray them prior to 1900, "with no clear vision of what happened after that" (Landry, 2014). Half of the states make no mention of specific tribal names or individual members, while the most commonly mentioned Natives were Sacagawea, Squanto, Sequoyah, and Sitting Bull (Landry, 2014). Only 62 of the over 500 American Indian tribal nations are mentioned and often only by one state and only four states include critical content concerning American Indian boarding schools (Landry, 2014). Representation varies across states

with New Mexico being the only state to mention a member of the American Indian Movement (AIM), an American Indian civil rights organization created to bring awareness to the injustices faced by the American Indian population (American Indian Movement); Washington being the only state to utilize the term ‘genocide’ (in fifth grade standards); and Nebraska, overall, utilizing textbooks that portray American Indians as “lazy, drunk or criminal” (Landry, 2014).

Wade (2014) posits that the historical mindset in which American Indians are often presented and understood could possibly help us explain and understand why many people in the United States of America do not see issues with the continual degradation and erasure of American Indians including dressing up like American Indians for Halloween, the persistence of derogatory American Indian mascots such as the Washington Redskins, the invisibility of American Indian reservations and tribal land on Google maps, and the lack of visibility of American Indian issues in mainstream media. The history of American Indians and their constant conflicts with the American educational system has left many tribal nations pursuing education in their own unique way in hopes of representing their tribal culture in a positive light. We find this story unique for the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina.

### **The Lumbee Tribe and the Fight for Education**

The war for Indian children will be won in the classroom (Wilma Mankiller as quoted in Grande, 2015, p. 15).

It was almost like a family reunion. I made my way to my seat at the 2013 Commencement Ceremony at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, located in the heart of Robeson County and the central location of Lumbee land. My eyes scanned the crowd and found a familiar Lumbee face on nearly every row. “Please rise for the honor song.” Standing in front of my folding chair under the cover of a large pine tree, I watched as Miss Lumbee, our tribal ambassador, along with Teen Miss Lumbee, Junior Miss Lumbee, and Little Miss Lumbee led the graduates to their seats. Dressed in their traditional regalia, the ambassadors were a warm reminder of the institution’s roots. Clearly paying homage to the traditional Lumbee beginnings of the university, the conclusion of the 125th anniversary celebration sought to remind students of all the Lumbee community had done to ensure the education of their children and thus the birth of the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. A powerful Lumbee presence at the commencement ceremony portrayed to all guests the pride still held in an institution that has served as the “cradle of Indian prosperity” for many in the Lumbee community.

The education of those within the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina finds its history mandated to navigate political and racial lines, a story with its origins in the power of language. The American Indian population within Robeson and surrounding counties has been forced to constantly renegotiate not only their identity but also their simple name identification countless times since their first contact with Scottish settlers in the 1730s (Oakley, 2006/ 2007, p. 60). Refusing to fit silently into the bi-racial system that recognized only black or white, the Lumbee people of Robeson County forced the

local and national government to recognize their status as neither black nor white but as Lumbee (Oakley, 2006/2007, p. 64).

Prior to European contact, the original inhabitants of the southeastern part of North Carolina belonged to three primary language groups, the Algonkian, the Iroquoian, and the Siouan speaking peoples (Oakley, 2006/ 2007, p. 60). The Algonkian included the Hatteras and Pamlico peoples who resided along the coast; the Iroquoian-speaking peoples included the Tuscarora, Meherrin, and the Cherokee and lastly, the Siouan speaking peoples included the Waccamaws', Saponis', and the Occaneechis' (Oakley, 2006/2007, p. 60). Presently known as the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, the origins of the Lumbee people is a highly contested debate. Some historians have linked the present-day Lumbee Tribe to the Lost Colony in Virginia while other historians consider the present-day Lumbee people to be a conglomerate of various tribal nations who sought refuge together following the Tuscarora Wars (Lowery, 2010, p. 5). Thus, at the time of first European contact, there was no tribal nation identified as the "Lumbee Tribe." Instead the inhabitants of the southeastern part of North Carolina were thought to be a variety of tribal nations who joined together for protection and safety. To the Europeans settlers these original inhabitants of North Carolina inherited the collective name "Indian." Bestowed by Christopher Columbus, some historians presume he used this word because of the assumption that he had landed in the country of India via the Indian Ocean while others purport that at this time there was no country named India and instead the Spanish term "in dios" was used to identify the spiritual connection the inhabitants had to God (Giago, 2011; Walbert, n.d.).

The term “Indian” set apart the original inhabitants of North Carolina as neither black nor white and they fought to remain as such (Lowery, 2009; Oakley, 2006/2007, p. 64; Blu, 1980, p. 5). Viewed as an attack of both their cultural and racial heritage, the original inhabitants of the southeastern part of North Carolina forced the federal government to recognize their distinct and unique status and thus refused to attend either white or black schools, evoking tribal sovereignty and building their own school in 1885 (Oakley, 2006/2007, p. 64; Lumbee Timeline, n. d.). Long termed the “Indians of Robeson County”, life in a tri-racial world soon led to a series of negotiations and name changes as the original inhabitants became entangled in a world of authenticity mandated by state and federal officials (Lowery, 2009, p. 503). The names associated with the original inhabitants of the southeastern part of North Carolina have all been tied to differing accounts of their origin. The Croatan name has its premise in the Lost Colony theory whereas the various names that coincide with the Cherokee Tribe find their roots in theories that purport that the Lumbee are descendants of the Cherokee. The following is a synthesized presentation of the name changes faced by the original inhabitants of North Carolina following their interaction with European settlers:

1885: Recognized as Croatan

1911: Indians of Robeson County

1912: Cherokee Indians (because of their presumed connection to the Eastern and of Cherokee)

1913: Cherokee Indians of Robeson County

1933: Siouan Indians of the Lumber River

1956: Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina  
(Lowery, 2009; Oakley, 2006/2007, Lumbee Timeline, n.d.; Sider, 2003, p. 3;  
Barton, 1967, p. 53)

The efforts of the Lumbee people to remain separate in their identity and force recognition of their culture in a world that was bi-racial ensured that the state of North Carolina could no longer ignore their call (Blu, 1980, p. 5). Establishing their own educational system as well as their own churches, the Lumbee, fore fronted the importance of their culture, education, and religion. Recognized in 1885 as the Croatan, Conservative Democrat Hamilton McMillan petitioned for the Lumbee to have their own educational system and was thus approved and established by the North Carolina General Assembly (Lumbee Timeline, n.d; Lowery, 2010, p. 25; Dial, 1975, p. 90; Evans, 1979, p. 56; Evans, 1967, p. 86). This law now split the general funds that had been previously only reserved for white-only and black-only schools to now be shared with Indian-only schools (Lowery, 2010, p. 25). Establishing a separate school system for members of the Lumbee tribe worked to promise not only an education for Lumbee youth but also to support efforts for tribal autonomy (Lowery, 2010, p. 25; Evans, 1979, p. 57). Now in charge of educating their own students as well as hiring their own educators, the Lumbee people wanted to ensure that those educating their students were role models from within their own community. However, there was one catch, those within the Lumbee community wishing to be educators within the Lumbee school system could not attend the postsecondary institutions for teacher preparation unless they planned to work within the black school system (Lowery, 2010, p. 26; Dial, 1975, p. 90).

Representative McMillan again proposed legislation that would support an Indian Normal School that would prepare Lumbee educators from within the Lumbee community (Lowery, 2010, p. 26; Dial, 1975, p. 90). Given \$500 to only pay salaries from the North Carolina General Assembly, the community was still underfunded and under resourced in terms of a building as well as land to host the Croatan Normal School (Lowery, 2010, p. 26; History of UNC Pembroke, n.d.; Dial, 1975, p. 91; Evans, 1979, p. 56). In a collective effort from the Lumbee community, money was raised, land was purchased and a two-story building became the foundation for the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, opening in 1888 with fifteen students and one teacher (History of UNC Pembroke, n.d.; Lowery, 2010, p. 26).

The growth and persistence of the Croatan Normal School within the tribal community served and continues to serve as a testament to the tenacity of local community members and their passion for autonomy, sovereignty, and education. Beginning with instruction centralized for elementary and secondary education and then migrating to a two-year teaching training program followed by a two-year junior college and ultimately an institution offering four year degrees in 1940, the Croatan Normal School also outgrew its name (Lumbee Timeline, n.d.; History of UNC Pembroke, n.d.). Shifting from the Croatan Normal School to a series of names that included (in chronological order) the Indian Normal School of Robeson County, the Cherokee Indian Normal School of Robeson County, the Pembroke State College for Indians, Pembroke State College, Pembroke State University and presently, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (History of UNC Pembroke, n.d.; Dial, 1975, p. 94), the work, time, love,

and passion placed in the efforts to ensure the college's success exists to this day. From 1939 to 1953, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke stood as the only state-supported four-year college for Indians in the entire nation (History of UNC Pembroke, n.d.), a hefty title with extremely humble beginnings.

First opened to all qualified applicants no matter their race in 1954, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke remains the crown jewel for the Lumbee community (History of UNC Pembroke, n.d.). In 2005, Governor Mike Easley declared the University as “North Carolina’s Historically American Indian University” (History of UNC Pembroke, n.d.). Celebrating the 125th anniversary of its founding from 2012 to 2013, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke is home to over 6,000 students from an array of backgrounds, providing 41 undergraduate majors and 18 graduate programs (History of UNC Pembroke, n.d.).

Though the history of education for the Lumbee tribe has been one of perseverance, the most beautiful stories find their value not in the timelines or the books but instead in the oral stories that I have heard shared over dinner tables, coffee cups, and powwow circles. Mrs. Deana, a well-known community favorite, with the spunkiest personality and a fashionable lifestyle, is a frequent visitor at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, her alma mater. Establishing a scholarship in memory of her husband who recently passed away, Mrs. Deana proclaimed her passion of continuing to support the university that gave her so much and prepared her to be an educator.

My own mother also found her home at the University for a short period of time. She recollects taking the plunge and moving to Pembroke to be with her older sister

while also knowing that money was tight and that working a full-time job was an absolute must. Attending school full-time and attempting to work full-time still limited the amount of extra money my mama had to spend even on necessities. Finding herself short on funding for new tires for her car, the Lumbee community was always there to support the students at the University, no matter where they came from. A local tire salesman made a frequent deal with my mama, \$25 for tires, no extra charge. A deal a student can't refuse and support one does not easily forget.

Timeless in its continual support of Lumbee students, my best friend, Mandy, found her home at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke after becoming pregnant our senior year in high school. Unable to go away to college, again, a testimony to a school dedicated to education, Mandy was able to flourish at the University while not only taking the necessary classes for graduating but joining a sorority, gaining over a 1,000 hours of community service for graduate school all while maintaining a GPA high enough to graduate with honors. Supported continually by the professors, faculty, and community, Mandy could graduate in four years with a beautiful four-year-old son who crawled and walked by her side the entire time.

The story of education for the Lumbee tribe has been a roller coaster ride of political battles, tribal sovereignty, and name changes. This historical journey is one that continues to pave a path in the Lumbee community. While the University of North Carolina at Pembroke still stands as a beacon of hope for Lumbee tribal elders and future generations, as presented in chapter one the stark statistics of local primary schools make matriculation into institutions of higher learning difficult with only 15% of the student

body at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke identifying as American Indian (About UNC Pembroke, Quick Facts, n.d.).

While the educational journey in the Lumbee community has had its ups and downs, so has the realm of education as it relates to working with minoritized groups, particularly American Indians. The integration of American Indian culture within the public-school classroom has pushed educators, pedagogues, and theorists to reshape the traditional classroom to find a place where American Indian students can not only see themselves but also be themselves.

### **American Indians and the Classroom**

Though the story of mission and boarding schools are a hardened part of the educational history of the American Indian population, their legacy continues to live on. Current theories related to working with American Indian students within the educational realm seek to bring to light the diverse culture of the American Indian population, a culture that was once shamed and hidden. Despite the greatest efforts from contemporary pedagogues and educators, the culture of American Indians often still finds its place on lost bookshelves, on multicultural days and in stereotypical pictures. Eighty-seven percent of all references to Native Americans in curricula across the 50 states portray the Native American population in a pre-1900's context (Landry, 2014; Wade, 2014). This curriculum presents issues for not only the American Indian population but non-American Indians as well. Often graduating with no concept of the contemporary American Indian population, culture or sovereignty, non-American Indian students often perceive that "all Indians are dead" (Landry, 2014). With the curricula of all 50 states

lacking information about the contemporary American Indian population, the resulting consequences make it easier for non-American Indians to justify stereotypical, racialized mascots as well as Halloween costumes (Wade, 2014). The story of tribal nations in the United States is presented as historic and thus irrelevant in today's world (Landry, 2014; Wade, 2014; Haynes, 2008, p. 8).

Multifaceted and complex, the many issues facing Indian Country today find their root in institutionalized systems of colonization, racism, and hegemony among many other things. This invisibility within the school curriculum can be linked to an institution that values a particular whitestream (Urrieta, 2012) history and a particular realm of knowledge above all others. Students of color from low-income homes frequently perform lower on standardized measures because the culture within their homes and within the educational system is often at odds with each other (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 946). Though not the answer to all the issues facing the American Indian population, research has shown that the integration of American Indian culture into the classroom has the possibility to lead to not only increased academic performance but also American Indian youth who have increased self-esteem, "healthy identity formation, more self-directed and politically active, give more respect to tribal elders, have a positive influence in their tribal communities, exhibit more positive classroom behavior and engagement" (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 958; Kodaseet & Varma, 2012, p. 73; Gay, 2010, p. 127). The integration of American Indian culture within the classroom, stemming from a history of invisibility and a current state of academic, social, physical, and economic despair, could significantly shift the current educational standing of

American Indian students in the United States and could prove increasingly important to American Indian youth as individuals as well as tribal nations as a whole. Today's educational frameworks concerning the integration of American Indian culture within the classroom is informed by a plethora of theories and educational approaches including Critical Race Theory, Critical Theory, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Critical Pedagogy, Red Pedagogy, Multicultural Education, American Indian Studies and TribalCrit just to name a few. In the following sections, I discuss Tribal Critical Race Theory as the primary lens of this work followed by various educational theories that have found their home within culturally relevant pedagogy.

Current educational frameworks and theories have taken various avenues throughout the years and as such, have had the fluidity to grow and evolve as pedagogues, theorists, and practitioners have invested time and thought to its development. Thus, for the Indigenous population a vital understanding of TribalCrit and Indigenous Knowledge Systems leads one to better understand the unique ways American Indian culture finds its place in a culturally relevant classroom. As scholars working within this realm often utilize the 'culturally relevant' terminology, I also sought to integrate recent pieces from scholars who have expanded upon this work first presented by Ladson-Billings (1995) by altering the terminology to culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014) and culturally revitalizing pedagogy (McCarty & Lee, 2014).

### **Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit)**

Born out of the work of Critical Race Theory, Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) was developed by scholar Bryan Brayboy (2005) as a way to discuss and theorize the unique position of the American Indian population as both a racial group as well as a political and legal entity within the United States (p. 429).

In the late 1980s, legal scholars working through critical theory often felt dissatisfied by the lack of discussions around race and racism in law and education (Yosso, 2005, p. 71; Akom, 2008). This issue with critical legal studies led to Critical Race Theory which “accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work[s] toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination” (Matsuda, 1991). Six themes define the critical race theory movement:

1. Critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.
2. Critical race theory expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness and meritocracy.
3. Critical race theory challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law...critical race theorists...adopt a stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage.
4. Critical race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society.
5. Critical race theory is interdisciplinary.
6. Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression. (Dixson & Rosseau, 2006, p. 33)

While delving into a critical world that sought to discuss the issues of race within America, many thought the bounds created by Critical Race Theory in its origin were rigid in their discussion of black and white (Yosso, 2005, p. 72). Cognizant of their own differences, struggles, histories, and stories, the birth of various critical perspectives sought to expand the black/ white binary of Critical Race Theory. Thus, ushering in an extension of this work in various forms entitled Latino/a Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), AsianCrit, and Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) among others (Yosso, 2005, p. 72).

With nine tenants, the primary tenet of TribalCrit “emphasizes that colonization is endemic to society” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429). The following are the nine tenets of TribalCrit:

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

8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.
9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429-430).

Valuing cultural knowledge, the ability to survive, and academic knowledge (Brayboy, 2005, p. 434), TribalCrit seeks to address the ways in which today's educational system seeks to colonize and assimilate American Indian youth (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430). Forwardly refuting the goal of assimilation, TribalCrit seeks to educate American Indian youth on ways to combine their Indigenous ways of being as well as their Western ways of being "in order to actively engage in survivance, self-determination, and tribal autonomy" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 437).

The lens of TribalCrit, uniquely distinguishable from Critical Race Theory, allows one the ability to address the issues facing the American Indian population while also taking into account the unique role American Indians have in the United States as both a racial group as well as a legal and political entity (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430; Haynes, 2008, p. 10; Richardson, 2012, p. 467). Related to politics, TribalCrit has as its primary goal, a push towards tribal sovereignty and tribal autonomy that allows tribal nations to regain control of their lands, education, language and resources (Brayboy, 2005, p. 433). This allows educators to view issues within the classroom from a lens that seeks to decolonize American Indian students while also seeking to decolonize the classroom and educational institution. In doing so, TribalCrit offers "the possibility of unmasking, exposing, and

confronting continued colonization within educational contexts and societal structures, thus transforming those contexts and structures for Indigenous Peoples” (Haynes, 2008, p. 2).

Utilized as a theoretical lens by many researchers working with American Indian populations (Conn, 2013; Kitchen et. al, 2010; Williams, 2013; Waterman et. al, 2013; Grayshield et al, 2015; Robertson, 2015; Gray, 2011; Kitchen, 2013), TribalCrit, as originally published by Brayboy (2005), has not been expanded upon by other scholars outside of the application of the theoretical lens of their studies. Though influential and significant in its ability to reframe the perspective of Critical Race Theory to forefront issues such as sovereignty and colonization as it relates to the American Indian population in the United States, many questions still arise as it relates to the “unique legal relationship” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 433) that tribal nations have with the United States and ways in which even these relationships reinforce systems of colonization and assimilation. For example, historically the right for tribal sovereignty has been sought through a lengthy process that grants recognition as a federally recognized tribe. Often pitting tribal nations against each other to prove validity of Indigenous lineage in a Western/ European context (Grande, 2015, p. 145), I wonder the role this federal versus state status debate plays in the colonization of tribal nations throughout this process. Is it possible that tribal nations can stand on their own as sovereign nations without the interference and due process of the United States government? If not, does the power that the federal government maintains in the process strip tribal nations of the sovereignty and autonomy they are actually seeking? Despite this shortcoming, TribalCrit provides

the theoretical lens that allows us to critique, question and critically review past, present and future American Indian education initiatives.

### **Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

As a core part of TribalCrit, Brayboy (2005) discusses the ways in which knowledge itself takes on a different definition when viewed through an Indigenous lens. TribalCrit addresses this understanding of indigenous knowledge by seeking to value the “tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions and visions” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430) that compromise indigenous knowledge systems.

Defined by Grenier (1998) as “the unique, traditional, local knowledge existing within and developed around the specific conditions of women and men indigenous to a particular geographic area” (p. 1), indigenous knowledge has stood the test of time for generations and has been stored within the thoughts, minds, memories, and activities of indigenous peoples (Grenier, 1998, p. 2). Living in the “stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, dances, myths, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws, local language and taxonomy, agricultural practices, equipments, materials, plant special and animal breed[s]” (Grenier, 1998, p. 2; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009, p. 3), the history of indigenous knowledge systems has a marred story of assimilation and colonization as it rocks on the brink of disappearance for many tribal nations (Barnhardt, 2008, p. 154; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009, p. 17).

Sustained for generations despite wars, genocide, and societal upheaval, indigenous knowledge systems have long been viewed by outsiders as “primitive, simple, static, ‘not knowledge’ or folklore” (Grenier, 1998, p. 5). The attack on Indigenous

People's ways of being and knowing have worked to eliminate the culture and knowledge of Indigenous people by stripping them of their language, their land, their ceremonies, and traditions (Simpson, 2004, p. 375; p. 377). The deficit view of Indigenous Knowledge Systems has made it easy for those who do not understand it to relegate it as "less than" the dominant ways of knowing in America (Simpson, 2004, p. 374; Doxtater, 2004, p. 629; Grenier, 1998, p. 5; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009, p. 3).

Those who call for the integration of indigenous knowledge systems within the classroom as well as a simple valuing and recognition of indigenous ways of knowing have decolonization as a primary goal (Barnhardt, 2008, p. 159; Simpson, 2004, p. 373; Doxtater, 2004, p. 620, p. 626). Brayboy & Maughan (2009) point to the critical ways that "teaching itself is a political act" (p. 2) and thus within the classroom, by privileging a whitestream (Urrieta, 2012) way of knowing, educators are making a political decision that disenfranchises American Indian students as individuals, as a community, and as tribal nations. The call for indigenous knowledge systems within the classroom has the ability to reframe these spaces from sites of disenfranchisement into "sites of hope and possibility" (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009, p. 2). In these spaces, valuing Indigenous knowledge as useful, worthy, and valid helps to decolonize dominant ideologies (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009, p. 5; Simpson, 2004, p. 373).

With an overarching goal of decolonization, there are several components of Indigenous Knowledge Systems that were frequently mentioned by scholars. Seeking to remain true to the community and innate characteristics of reciprocity, Indigenous Knowledge Systems are often resplendent of holistic learning and ways of knowing that

show a broad, widespread connections of knowledge (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009, p. 3, p. 12; Barnhardt, 2008, p. 154). Also, common among Indigenous Knowledge Systems are the ways in which knowledge is shared, often through oral communication (Simpson, 2004, p. 379; Grenier, 1998, p. 2). The sharing of stories, experiences, and traditions often occurs through the oral communication and relationship building between younger generations and the elders. Because the knowledge systems of Indigenous Peoples are popularly based on this method of communication, preservation and longevity are difficult to maintain (Simpson, 2004, p. 374). Indigenous knowledge systems also value the Indigenous language and Native lands of the various tribal nations thus, classrooms that privilege one language over another aid in the system of colonization that prevents the revitalization of Indigenous languages. Within many tribal communities, language revitalization holds the key to the revival of Indigenous Knowledge Systems as the “structure and composition is designed to articulate Indigenous worldviews, values conceptualizations and knowledge” (Simpson, 2004, p. 377). This truth also holds for traditional lands and sacred sites of tribal nations. Their preservation extends far beyond simple land rights but, as does language, preserves critical parts of indigenous knowledge systems that cannot be replicated or shared in other ways (Simpson, 2004). Though there are various components found throughout the articles concerning Indigenous Knowledge Systems, scholars also pointed out the importance of understanding the ways in which this knowledge is not always universal but instead is place-based and finds its value in understanding the place one finds themselves and then interrogating the ways of knowing

for that tribal nation (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009, p. 10; Barnhardt, 2008, p. 154; Grenier, 1998, p. 2)

Indigenous Knowledge Systems are a key part to understanding and supporting American Indian students within the classroom while also providing a unique opportunity for their non-American Indian peers to understand and hear from a variety of perspectives (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009, p. 5, p. 18; Barnhardt, 2008, p. 159; Simpson, 2004, p. 379; Doxtater, 2004, p. 627; Cerecer, 2011, p. 173). Educators can welcome and provide a space for alternative ways of knowing while also working diligently to eliminate stereotypes. The integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems within the classroom works toward a system of decolonization and revitalization of Indigenous knowledge and culture and could also prove to be the critical way of not only teaching American Indian students but also the exclusive way in which educators can work with American Indian students without harming them (Brayboy & McCarty, 2013, p. 2).

A clear understanding of Indigenous Knowledge Systems holistically as well as within a place based context is paramount for educators who wish to integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems in their classroom. However, articles pertaining to Indigenous Knowledge Systems and their value predominantly cover Indigenous ways of knowing in Africa. A great amount of material has also been written to cover Indigenous populations in Canada and New Zealand. A literature search also showed that the Indigenous ways of knowing are popularly focused on the topic of natural resource management and agriculture. The broad spectrum in which the term ‘indigenous’ is applied calls for scholars to not only clearly state the population to which they are referring to with place

based explanations but also points to gaps within the literature that require scholars, researchers, and tribal nations to work together to share ways of knowing that are relatable to specific groups and tribal nations. This also brings forward the issue of language and ways it is applied within the classroom. Though here referred to as Indigenous Knowledge Systems, tribal nations may refer to their ways of knowing by the name of their tribal nation. In either instance, this call to action warrants educators to work closely with community members and tribal nation leaders to ensure that the information and ways they seek to integrate into their classroom are validly representative of that tribal nation and their indigenous knowledge systems. Those working with American Indian youth must also seek to understand the plurality of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and though there are common threads, there is great diversity amongst tribal nations. A thorough understanding of Indigenous Knowledge Systems as ways of knowing that are specific to peoples of a particular geographic location can help to alleviate anxiety induced from seeking to fully know and understand an alternative way of knowing but dually pushes educators and those invested in this work to work closely with tribal nations, Indigenous families, and community elders.

Understanding Indigenous Ways of Knowing and essential aspects of a student's culture and traditions allows educators foundational tools for information they will need to ensure their classroom setting, curriculum, and pedagogy are culturally responsive to American Indian students.

## **Culture & The Classroom**

The integration of culture within the classroom is not a new topic of discussion. Going by many names, the spectrum of this work was discussed by various scholars working with American Indian youth. I find it important to understand the roots of this movement, multicultural education, and its continual development to the most recent work with a culturally revitalizing pedagogy as well as works that provides critiques and alternatives (equity literacy and Red Pedagogy). The following review of literature presents the work of multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and culturally revitalizing pedagogy as the work that continually seeks to improve the academic setting for minoritized and marginalized student populations. As the most often mentioned, the review of literature concerning culturally relevant pedagogy is seen here in more detail. The continual development of approaches and strategies make this body of literature fluid and adaptable to the needs of various educators and students. Though common threads flow between the topics, increased information, theorizing, and praxis have lead those in the field of education to continually improve upon this work.

### **Multicultural Education**

The work and history of multicultural education has served as a foundational block for the subsequent work that sought to integrate culture into the classroom in order to positively benefit students who were often marginalized, invisible, and forgotten within the classroom and curriculum. Defined by Banks (1991) as a “child of the civil rights movement” (p. 34), multicultural education was born out of the call of African

American civil rights leaders to include their voices and histories in the school curriculum (Banks, 1991, p. 34; Banks, 1974; Levinson, 2007, p. 634). The Western curriculum presented a white washed history that excluded or falsely proclaimed the histories of African Americans, American Indian, Latin@s, and other non-White groups, thus this call from the civil rights movement sought to bring a more factual, diverse, and truthful aspect to the school curriculum (Banks, 1991, p. 34). This call from the 1960s civil rights leaders pushed for the integration of African American culture into the curriculum, the hiring of African American staff, and administrators and the acceptance of African American English within the classroom (Banks, 1974, p. 4). Finding its strength in the civil rights movement, other groups also began to make similar requests of school systems (Banks, 1974, p. 4).

Over time the definition and goal of multicultural education has changed (Levinson, 2007, p. 633). Originally simply calling for curricular change and inclusion (Banks, 1991, p. 33-34), multicultural education was presented as the creation of “equal educational opportunities for all students by ensuring that the total school environment reflects the diversity of groups in classrooms, schools, and the society as a whole” (Banks, 1994, p. 4). Soon it became clear to educators and others concerned with this topic that inclusion was not enough (Levinson, 2007, p. 634). The 1990s brought about theorists who saw multicultural education as a critical site for social change in order to bring to light the issues of racism, discrimination, and power (Levinson, 2007, p. 634). In 2001, Banks presented the notion that multicultural education must find as its primary goal the acquisition of “knowledge, values and skills that students need to participate in

social change” (Levinson, 2007, p. 634) thus differing slightly from the goal presented in 1994 which called for the acquisition of the knowledge that “students needed to think, decide and take personal, social, and civic action” (Banks, 1994, p. 8).

Banks (1994) established 5 dimensions of multicultural education in order to reach the goals of educational equality as well as representative diversity. The 5 dimensions of multicultural education call attention to content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equitable pedagogy, and a school culture of empowerment (Banks, 1994, p. 5; Levinson, 2007, p. 633; Abington-Pitre, 2015, p. 1). In greater detail Banks as quoted in Levinson (2007) states,

They [teachers] should use content from diverse groups when teaching concepts and skills, help students to understand how knowledge in the various disciplines is constructed, help students to develop positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors, and modify their teaching strategies so that students from different racial, cultural, language, and social-class groups will experience equal educational opportunities. The total environment and culture of the school must also be transformed so that students from diverse groups will experience equal status in the culture and life of the school (p. 633) These 5 components are coupled with goals that seek to create a classroom that respects and appreciates diversity while also equipping students with the necessary skills to succeed and take action (Banks, 1994, p. 8; Banks, 1991, p. 32; Levinson, 2007, p. 626; Grant, 1978).

Though fluid in its ability to adapt to the critiques of those who proclaim it is not doing enough, multicultural education has also raised concerns from others as well as

Banks himself who seek to critically analyze its implementation as well as the name ‘multicultural education’. Some scholars (Kodaseet & Varma, 2012, p. 73; Levinson, 2007, p. 634) seek to critique the simple inclusion idea of multicultural education that has permeated many classrooms. Simple festivals and cultural celebrations do not fulfill the goals of multicultural education which call for education that leads to freedom (Banks, 1991, p. 32), knowledge that leads to personal, civic, and social action (Banks, 1994, p. 8), and actions that “challenge the United States to live up to its ideal of justice and equality” (Levinson, 2007, p. 626).

Scholars who focus specifically on work with American Indians (Kodaseet & Varma, 2012; Richardson 2012) also critique the work of multicultural education and its disregard for direct decolonization. Directly establishing diplomacy and decolonization as a role in multicultural education requires educators to act as diplomats between sovereign tribal nations and the institution of school and vice versa (Richardson, 2012 p. 466). Richardson (2012) also challenges educators within the field of multicultural education to clearly understand the sovereignty of tribal nations and the way in which they can encourage the self-governance of tribal nations. However, because of the lack of recognition of sovereignty in multicultural education literature, institutions are disabled in their transformation toward more decolonized ways (p. 475). Kodaseet and Varma (2012) partner the components and goals of multicultural education with the theoretical work of TribalCrit in order to directly address the issues of colonization and the work toward sovereignty within the educational system.

The work of multicultural education has laid a powerful foundation for populations that have long been invisible within the world of education. Multicultural education serves as a critical predecessor for understanding ways to work with diverse populations within the classroom. Calling for diverse perspectives, accurate histories, and a complete restructuring of teaching strategies and the school environment, multicultural education opened the door for culturally relevant teaching.

### **Culturally Relevant Teaching**

Literature pertaining to the integration of American Indian culture within the classroom frequently found itself situated within the body of culturally relevant teaching. American Indian scholars and those working largely with American Indian students utilized the theoretical lens of TribalCrit to integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems into the classroom through culturally relevant teaching.

Presented through many names, culturally responsive schooling (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Santamaria, 2009), culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2000), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) culture-based education (Schonleber, 2011), culturally based curriculum (Lipka et al, 2005), culturally responsive pedagogies (Savage et al, 2011), culturally appropriate (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007) and socio-culturally responsive teaching (Lee & Cerecer, 2010), it was clear that the utilization of culture within the classroom, “makes sense to students who are not members of, or assimilated into, the dominant social group” (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, pg. 32). The work largely pertained to Ladson-Billings’ (1995) ideas around culturally relevant teaching and pedagogies. In this section, the term ‘culturally

relevant teaching' signifies work within the classroom that seeks to maintain and encourage cultural competence as well as academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476; Gay, 2010, p. 26; Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 210; Santamaria, 2009, p. 222; Gay, 2000, p. 3). Alternative terminology may be presented as directly quoted from various literatures but will hold a synonymous meaning.

Made famous by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant teaching came out of Ladson-Billings (1995) work with educators who were successfully working with African American students in their classes through the integration of students' cultures and the expectation of academic excellence. Culturally relevant teaching is presented as a model that seeks to address academic achievement while also working to affirm cultural identity within the classroom, including efforts that seek to minimize the cultural gap between home and school (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 467; Brayboy, 2009, p. 32; Santamaria, 2009, p. 224). Culturally relevant teachers empower students by presenting information through "their cultural frames of reference" (Gay, 2010, p. 26) thus making the information more relatable and meaningful.

While working to integrate the culture of diverse students within the classroom, culturally relevant teachers do so with a goal of empowerment and academic excellence as well as cultural competency (Gay, 2010, p. 21, p. 127; Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 159). Encouraged to maintain academic excellence, culturally relevant teaching also calls educators and students to seek to work towards maintaining cultural integrity for diverse students (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476). Thus, valuing their culture within the

classroom and seeking to demolish the cultural hierarchy that values dominant Western/European ways of knowing and being.

Ladson-Billings (1995) found three key criteria for culturally relevant teaching: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 210; Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 159; Santamaria, 2009, p. 223; Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476; Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 75; Gay, 2010, p. 47). Educators working through a culturally relevant paradigm understand the importance of academic success and expect students to learn by ensuring that the curriculum is challenging while also maintaining high standards (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 210; Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 159; Santamaria, 2009, p. 223). Along with high expectations and challenging coursework, culturally relevant teaching calls for educators to have a belief in the learning capabilities of each student (Santamaria, 2009, p. 223). Secondly, Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000) called for education that dually aspired towards cultural competence as well as academic excellence. Presented as “the ability to function effectively in one’s culture of origin” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 210), cultural competence within the classroom calls for educators to value the culture, language, and lives of diverse students within the classroom thus pushing educators to learn about the cultures of diverse students and utilizing it as a foundation for learning (Santamaria, 2009, p. 223; Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 210). Lastly, sociopolitical consciousness helps students to understand systems of inequality and helped them to critique the systems that reproduce such inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 210). This recognition and critical

consciousness calls for a commitment to collective empowerment (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 159).

Aside from Ladson-Billings (1995) criteria for culturally relevant teaching, Geneva Gay (2010) identified six characteristics that have been both mentioned by researchers but also characterize key aspects of culturally relevant teaching for American Indian students. Culturally relevant teaching must be “validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory” (Santamaria, 2009, p. 223; Gay, 2010). Culturally relevant teaching seeks to validate diverse cultures, apply diverse cultural aspects to curriculum content, build relationships between students and educators while working with the strengths of students to empower and liberate them (Gay, 2010).

The multidimensionality and comprehensiveness of culturally relevant teaching has led many scholars to also identify other various key components that must be considered when working within culturally relevant teaching (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 948). Researchers speak to the importance of diverse communication styles and language valuing within the classroom (Gay, 2010, p. 126; Gutierrez, et al, 1999, p. 293; Lee & Cerecer, 2010, p. 199), the value of in-service education for current educators (Cazden & Leggett, 1976, p. 30), a diverse and culturally representative staff (Cazden & Leggett, 1976, p. 30), the value of learning in community (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 481), and the importance of a supportive administration throughout this work (Brayboy, 2009, p. 48).

Hence culturally relevant teaching is fluid and far-reaching. American Indian scholars and those working with American Indian populations have been able to utilize the work of culturally relevant teaching in order to find ways to integrate American Indian culture and Indigenous Knowledge Systems into the classroom. This research has led to clear findings concerning the best ways to work with American Indian students in terms of culturally relevant teaching.

### **American Indian Culture and Culturally Relevant Teaching**

Understanding that “schooling is most effective when there is a greater match between the cultural norms and expectations of the school and those of the student” (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 957), culturally relevant teaching provides educators working with the American Indian population the tools to not only bridge the gap between the school and home community of American Indian students (Brayboy, 2009, p. 32) but also the tools to integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems into the classroom in order to decolonize education for American Indian students. Through research with American Indian students, scholars have identified culturally relevant ways to work with American Indian students. Presented here, key aspects of culturally relevant teaching as it relates to American Indian students includes American Indian students’ diverse ways of learning, the representation of their culture in the classroom, and the educator’s understanding.

**Ways of learning.** The educational setting that many American Indian students now find themselves in values competition, rote learning, and teacher led instruction. However, Indigenous Knowledge Systems often clash with dominant society’s ways of

learning. Researchers found that American Indian students were more successful when learning was cooperative, experiential/ hands-on, and holistic (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 954; Brayboy, 2014, p. 400; Brayboy, 2009, p. 42; Guillory, 2014, p. 157, p. 163; Plank, 1994; Schonleber, 2012, p. 16; Lipka et al, 2005, p. 34; Yurkovich, 2001, p. 268; Cerecer, 2011, p. 176).

Research concerning the education of American Indian students encourages an educational environment that, as opposed to dominant society, encourages cooperation. Traditional ways of knowing and being within American Indian communities' value cooperation and collaboration among tribal members and thus this way of knowing is well known to American Indian students (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 962).

Acculturated as cooperative beings (Brayboy, 2005, p. 438), American Indian students generally react positively to environments founded upon cooperation (Plank, 1994).

Current educational theories and practices often promote the idea of collaborative groups and the idea of cooperation however, Brayboy & Castagno (2008) discuss the implementation of a cooperative educational environment that "is an attitude towards students, a concept of learning, a whole way of life within the classroom and, hopefully, through the school" (p. 962), hence far exceeding simple group projects and peer check-ins. Though not always viewed favorably in a society that values competition, ranking, and first place, those that value cooperation may be viewed as interdependent and lacking in self-sufficiency (Brayboy, 2005, p. 438). However, cooperative learning not only benefits American Indian students by aligning with their home and tribal culture but could also prove beneficial for their non-American Indian peers. van Geel and Vedder

(2011) showed that casual contact and a culture of collaboration within the classroom helped students learn about diverse cultures and strengthened students' multicultural attitudes which, is defined as "the conviction that individuals necessarily view the world from within deeply rooted cultural beliefs, and the conviction that other cultures do not only have the right to exist, but may also provide valuable learning opportunities" (p. 550).

Also, culturally relevant to American Indian students within the classroom is the preference for learning that is experiential and hands-on (Cerecer, 2011, p. 176; Lipka et al, 2005, p. 32; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 954; Schonleber, 2012, p. 16). Established in tight-knit communities, indigenous knowledge and ways of being are often passed down from generation to generation by hands-on activities between elders and youth (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 956). Within many American Indian communities, students' first experience with learning takes place through silent observation, modeling, and then their own hands-on trial (Plank, 1994; Schonleber, 2012, p. 16). This process is described in traditional Hawaiian as "ma ka hana ka 'ike, from doing one learns" (Schonleber, 2012, p. 16). This modeling and observation paired with hands-on learning appeared in various research studies and in one was termed "expert-apprentice modeling" (Lipka et al, 2005, p. 32).

Through the tool of hands-on education, educators can integrate experiential learning that connects the home culture of American Indian students to their academic attainment within the classroom. Educators can work to connect real activities within the American Indian culture and tribal community to the classroom that are of high interest to

both tribal members and tribal students (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 46). The integration of issues within the tribal community into the school setting not only proves as a tool for validation but can also help students connect their academic career to their tribal community, thus strengthening both (Guillory & Williams, 2014, p. 166).

Finally, American Indian authors working to understand the ways in which American Indian students learn also presented the ways in which information is typically presented in segmented, disconnected ways, which is counterintuitive to the holistic ways in which American Indian youth are socialized to think about the world and knowledge. Foundational to Indigenous Knowledge Systems is the idea of holistic thinking. This circular worldview allows American Indians to think broadly and collectively about everything and everyone in order to find both their place while also finding connections with others (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009, p. 13). Researchers showed that this big picture, holistic way of thinking could be as practical as the use of the whole language approach to teach reading (Brayboy, 2009, p. 42). In any context, providing American Indian students with a broader picture helps build connections and correlates to Indigenous ways of knowing.

**Representation of American Indian culture in the classroom.** Physical inclusion within the curriculum and physical space of the educational setting still proves to be problematic for the American Indian population. American Indian representation has often been simply relegated to annual festivals during American Indian heritage month that seek to celebrate food and games without a clear connection to American Indian culture (Haynes, 2008, p. 1). However, culturally relevant teaching in its

comprehensiveness calls for educators and administrators to critically review various aspects of the educational world in order to question whether or not American Indian culture is represented (Castagno & Brayboy 2008, p. 948).

Within the physical classroom environment, American Indians are typically presented as historical artifacts of the past with no mention to contemporary American Indian culture (Haynes, 2008, p. 10). The pre-1900's context in which American Indians are presented leaves both American Indian and non-American Indians confused and misinformed about contemporary culture and even more dangerous, leads them to believe that all American Indians are the same and have the same culture (Landry, 2014; Wade, 2014; Reese, 2007, p. 247). Educators can fight this misrepresentation by ensuring that children's books adequately depict American Indian culture and can also work with tribal communities to present culturally accurate pictures of their place-based tribal nation (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 965). Educators can also work to ensure that their presentation of information is diverse in its perspectives and stories and can purposefully work to include the histories of American Indian people and, by taking it a step farther, can do so through the use of texts written by American Indian authors (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 42-43).

**Educator understanding of their students and local tribal community.** The final but foundational theme that emerged was the role of the educator and their understanding of American Indian culture. In order for Indigenous Knowledge Systems, cultural ways of learning, and the representation of culture in the classroom to be accurately represented, educators must have a clear understanding of their students and

the local tribal community (Powers et al, 2003, p. 19; Yurkovich, 2001, p. 266; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007, p. 87). This information should entail, at the most basic level, important facts about tribal sovereignty, significant tribal laws and pertinent court cases, local tribal government, community role models, tribal holidays, tribal myths, and basic do's and don'ts for the local tribal community (Guillory, 2014, p. 165; Plank, 1994, p. 135). Presented by Castagno & Brayboy (2008) as a constant learning process (p. 947), the journey to becoming a culturally competent teacher is never over.

Through coupling the work of culturally relevant teaching with the theoretical lens of TribalCrit, clear efforts must be taken to change the way that schools think about American Indian students (Brayboy, 2005, p. 442). Educators must work diligently to build relationships with the local tribal community with the understanding that there are wide ranges of cultural differences that exist among tribal nations (Guillory, 2014, p. 157), but despite these regional distinctions, tribal elders, community leaders, and local storytellers can be invaluable resources within the classroom (Guillory, 2014, p. 163). While educators can utilize the resources of tribal members within the classroom, Richardson (2012) also encourages educators to work as cultural diplomats between the educational arena and the community arena. As educators build their knowledge of both areas, their abilities to facilitate discussion and understanding between the two can be of critical use to American Indian communities as well as the education community (Richardson, 2012, p. 471).

The crucial importance of the continued education and re-education of today's educators often stems from the lack of information received in teacher preparation

programs (Haynes, 2008, p. 8; Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 212). Thus, the lack of information or false information received by teachers during their preparation programs is transmitted back into their classroom. However, actions by educators and administrators to work for consistent professional development workshops, adequate community relationships, and cultural validity can work to “transmit values, beliefs, knowledge, and norms that are consistent with their students’ home communities” (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, pg. 37; Cazden & Leggett, 1976. p. 30). As the “primary sites of change” (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 48), educators play a crucial role in knowledge production and transference within the classroom. Thus, their understanding of indigenous knowledge and American Indian culture can either promote valid perceptions or stereotypical, false, superficial knowledge to both American Indian and non-American Indians.

**The benefit and the critique.** The integration of students’ cultures in the classroom has proven beneficial for all students from traditionally marginalized backgrounds (Gay, 2010, p. 213) especially American Indian students. Not only leading to improved academic achievement (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 961; Brayboy, 2009, p. 32; Guillory, 2014, p. 166; Kodaseet & Varma, 2012, p. 73), culturally relevant teaching has had a holistically positive effect on American Indian youth (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 961). From enhanced self-esteem to positive and healthy identity formation, culturally relevant teaching while working with American Indian youth can also lead to politically active youth who reciprocate this positivity in their tribal

communities with increased respect for tribal elders (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 961; Kodaseet & Varma, 2012, p. 73; Burk, 2007, p. 13).

While findings clearly show the benefit of culturally relevant teaching for all students, the research studies discussed provided sweeping generalizations that typically applied to American Indians as a whole and more specifically to American Indians in the southwestern part of the United States thus rendering a gap in information concerning eastern tribes. Though culturally relevant teaching discusses the continual relevance of often-invisible cultures in the classroom, American Indian culture, emerging from a system of genocide and war, requires much more than relevance. American Indian culture requires revitalization.

**Culturally relevant teaching re-envisioned.** Though expansive in its span and promising in its goals, the work of culturally relevant teaching has been revisited and revitalized by scholars who sought to expand its reach. Using culturally relevant pedagogy as the place where the “beat drops” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 76), Paris (2012) sought to question the use of the term “relevant” as it pertains to culturally relevant teaching and critically explored its role in “ensuring maintenance of the languages and cultures” (p. 94) of the diverse communities in our classrooms (Paris & Alim, 2014). In doing so, Paris (2012) found that one could ensure relevance of something without guaranteeing its continued presence (Paris, 2012, p. 95; Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 88). Paris’ (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to sustain multilingualism and multiculturalism within the classroom as an extension of culturally relevant pedagogy (p. 95). Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to not only bring

diverse cultures into the classroom but also has as its goal efforts to “support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (Paris, 2012, p. 95).

McCarty and Lee (2014), recognizing the distinct positionality of American Indians’, extended the work of Paris’ (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy by not only acknowledging the importance of sustainability but also revitalization. Culturally revitalizing pedagogy, as a part of culturally sustaining pedagogy, seeks to “reclaim and revitalization what has been disrupted and displaced by colonization” (McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 103). Implementing a decolonizing stance, culturally revitalizing pedagogy forefronts the importance of American Indian language and culture and works to help American Indian youth revitalize what has previously been lost (McCarty & Lee, 2014).

The expansion of culturally relevant teaching by Paris (2012) and McCarty and Lee (2014) allows the American Indian population to not only include culture on a broad basis into the classroom but allows tribal communities to alter the setting to include specific, place based indigenous knowledge systems that not only include American Indian ways of knowing but also works to sustain and revitalize them for the next generation through a TribalCrit lens of decolonization.

While the original work of Ladson-Billings’ concerning culturally relevant teaching has been expanded and redefined to work for various populations, some scholars still feel as if the goals of this work limit the actions of educators. The work of equity literacy and Red Pedagogy seeks to centralize equity and decolonization respectively

while calling educators to play a more active and engaging role in not only understanding the culture of their students but in creating equitable environments and tearing down the walls of decolonization.

### **Equity Literacy**

Finding its origination in the “dissatisfaction with many popular frameworks” (Gorski, 2013, p. 18), equity literacy is defined by Gorski (2013) as “the skills and dispositions that enable us to recognize, respond to, and redress conditions that deny some students access to the educational opportunities enjoyed by their peers and, in doing so, sustain equitable learning environments for all students and families” (p. 19).

Whereas culturally relevant teaching and associated frameworks centralize the importance of culture, Gorski (2013) replaces this central focus with equity (Gorski, 2013, p. 20). Committed to “fairness, to equal opportunity, to a fair distribution of resources” (Gorski, 2013, p. 20), equity literacy, as presented by Gorski (2013) is comprised of four abilities and ten principles.

As an educator seeking to work under the framework of equity literacy, one cultivates the following four abilities: “the ability to recognize both subtle and not-so-subtle biases and inequities” (Gorski, 2013, p. 21), “the ability to respond to biases and inequities in the immediate term” (Gorski, 2013, p. 21), “the ability to redress biases and inequities in the longer term” (Gorski, 2013, p. 21) and finally, “the ability to create and sustain a bias-free and equitable learning environment for all students” (Gorski, 2013, p. 21). The ten principles of equity literacy, or the “consciousness behind the framework” (Gorski, 2013, p. 23) are presented to push educators past the idea of just culture and

diversity but instead to a thorough process that considers what it means for every student to be given the best education possible. The principles supporting this framework are:

1. The right to equitable educational opportunity is universal.
2. Poverty and class are intersectional in nature.
3. Poor people are diverse.
4. What we believe, including our biases and prejudices, about people in poverty informs how we teach and relate to people in poverty.
5. We cannot understand the relationship between poverty and education without understanding the biases and inequities experienced by people in poverty.
6. Test scores are inadequate measures of equity.
7. Class disparities in education are the result of inequities.
8. Equitable educators adopt a resiliency rather than a deficit view of low-income students and families.
9. Strategies for bolstering school engagement and learning must be based on evidence for what works.
10. The inalienable right to equitable educational opportunity includes the right to high expectations, higher-order pedagogies, and engaging curricula (Gorski, 2013, p. 23-33)

The work of equity literacy purports that simply knowing a great deal about the culture of a diverse student population still does not equip educators with adequate skills and tools to eradicate inequity within the classroom. The oversimplification of popular frameworks, particularly culturally relevant teaching, has led many educators to assume that the issues within the educational system are foundationally supported by “cultural misunderstandings rather than biases and inequities” (Gorski, 2013, p. 55). Utilizing

culture or the misunderstanding of culture to explain everything (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 104) renders invisible the insurmountable amount of inequalities that are faced by various groups (Gorski, 2013, p. 55). Thus, in a separate vein, equity literacy values and understands the role that culture plays but does not seek to see a lack of cultural understanding as leading to the inequities, biases, and disparities that various groups face based on their multifaceted and complex identities (Gorski, 2013, p. 54-55).

While Gorski's (2013) work with equity literacy seeks to assert the critical importance of equity and the role it plays in educators' beliefs, actions, and pedagogies, Grande's (2015) work around Red Pedagogy indigenize's critical theory and creates a path for American Indian education that breaks the barriers of the western classroom.

**Red Pedagogy: “Keep Calm and Decolonize” (Pochedly, 2015, p. 289)**

Red Pedagogy, as presented by Sandy Grande (2015) calls educators, particularly critical and Indigenous educators, to challenge the frameworks, models of thinking, and ways of knowing that have long excluded the ways in which American Indian people work (Yataco, 2015, p. xiii). Instead of working within the system of presented frameworks that have long failed the American Indian people, Grande's (2015) work in terms of red pedagogy pushes American Indian communities towards a renewed hope in their own “paradigms and epistemologies” (Yataco, 2015, p. xiii) and a nudge towards a reclamation of faith and sovereignty as American Indian people.

Employing the foundational work of critical pedagogy, Red Pedagogy seeks to rethink critical pedagogy from an Indigenous praxis (Grande, 2015, p. 32). Unlike traditional Western frameworks and theories that exist in a world of tension between the

past and the future, Red Pedagogy brings to light the “beliefs and understandings of our ancestors as well as the power of traditional knowledge” (Grande, 2015, p. 32).

Red Pedagogy, similar to Tribal Critical Theory, has an underlying goal of decolonization for American Indian nations (Tippeconnic III, 2015, p. 40). Red Pedagogy calls for a clear connection between critical theory, critical pedagogy, and sovereignty as a way to drastically change the face of American Indian education (Tippeconnic III, 2015, p. 41). The pedagogical structure of Red Pedagogy, its focus on decolonization, and its push towards tribal sovereignty, “provides methods of inquiry and analysis that expose, challenge, and disrupt the continuing colonization of their land and resources” (Grande, 2015, p. 117). Though constantly seeking the goal of decolonization, red pedagogues also understand that the work of decolonization is “perpetual as a process” (Grande, 2015, p. 234), it “is neither achievable nor definable” (Grande, 2015, p. 234).

Throughout the primary text concerning Red Pedagogy, pinning down a concise definition was difficult. The intricacies of this work for American Indian nations allowed it to flow through many contexts and become a deepening of understanding for American Indian educators as well as non-American Indians. Windchief, Garcia and San Pedro (2015) define Red Pedagogy in a breathtaking way that is worth sharing at length,

It is a space that is protected globally by the relatives of the Indigenous community we are privileged to be in, these relatives are the people of that place, they know the space, and often we are guests who may become relatives. It is a place where no one goes hungry because of an appreciation for the concept of generosity; it is a place of unknown potential through sharing. It recognizes the organization of nation, tribe, and family, in their uniqueness. It is also the fire

that warms us, sheds light upon us, and initiates intention, guiding the concepts of global Indigenous community solidarity (p. 281).

Red Pedagogy, like the work of equity literacy, extends its call for educators far beyond a simple understanding of culture, specifically American Indian culture.

Pochedly (2015) views the work of culturally relevant curricula as that of “band-aids created for an educational system structured to perpetuate the three pillars of White settler supremacy -- slavery/ capitalism, genocide/ colonialism, and orientalism/ war” (p. 293). Failing to recognize the unique role that American Indian’s hold within the United States of America as both political and racial, culturally relevant curricula often seek a model of inclusion whereas the work of Red Pedagogy directs the focus towards the liberation of tribal nations towards their own sovereign rule (Pochedly, 2015, p. 293). Within a classroom the conversation led by a red pedagogues would be reimagined as sites of “Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination” (Pochedly, 2015, p. 293). Thus, the educators, students, families and communities are engaged in a constant process of decolonization and healing for tribal nations (Pochedly, 2015, p. 294).

### **Conclusion**

From stolen stories in boarding schools, to unlimited resiliency and perseverance in search of their own educational system to frameworks that piece together aspirations of change, the educational story of American Indians is complex to say the least. A myriad history of a political entity, treated as a racial minority, in a toxic relationship with a government that is premised on assimilation, is a recipe for a nation that continues to navigate waters that are tumultuous.

As tribal nations continue to rebuild themselves in a world that is completely different from the one formed by our ancestors, the work presented here (Tribal Critical Pedagogy, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, etc.) gives educators, pedagogues, and tribal nations a foundational start for their work within the educational system. Supported by the work of Tribal Critical Pedagogy, I find the work of McCarty and Lee (2014) and culturally revitalizing pedagogy to be closely aligned with my own efforts. I also find that the work of Gorski's' (2012) equity literacy adds yet another dimension to this work that allows educators within the American Indian classroom practical tools and skills that can drastically alter the classroom environment and aesthetic.

Tribal Critical pedagogy, indigenous knowledge systems, and culturally revitalizing pedagogy all find their goals rooted in the work of decolonization, efforts to rewrite the history of the colonized. It is in the foundation of decolonization that I find the opportunity to place my work. While finding a foundational start in the work of decolonization, tribal critical pedagogy and culturally revitalizing pedagogy, I also find countless holes that do not allow the story of my people, the Lumbee people, to fit comfortably. Using Tribal Critical Pedagogy as a support for the work of culturally revitalizing pedagogy and then, pairing that with Gorski's' (2012) equity literacy, my work expands on this work to build tribally specific theories for the Lumbee people. This work will expand that done by Brayboys' Tribal Critical Pedagogy (2005) and McCarty and Lee's culturally revitalizing pedagogy (2014) to allow me to make this work tribally specific for the Lumbee people. While the broad work of decolonization has at its core

implications to bring to light the stories and histories of American Indian people, the application of Tribal Critical pedagogy and the stories of the Lumbee tribal young adults seek to bring forth the stories of the Lumbee people in efforts to share their success and barriers. This work will allow the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina to find a place in an American Indian world that has long told only the stories of those who speak fluently their tribal language and who have gained full federal recognition, thus working to bring to light the true diversity that exists amongst tribal nations.

It is this history, these stories, this foundation, this wisdom that forefronts the successes and barriers of Lumbee tribal youth. Birth from ancestors that have navigated a black and white world, grandparents who literally laid the foundation for their own university and parents who must live up to this reputation while fighting a racist and unjust system, Lumbee students have found their own unique ways of fighting the colonized system, climbing the mountain and beating down the barriers. Here we have our history, our foundation, our wisdom, they, Lumbee tribal youth hold our present, our future, our light, and our success.

### CHAPTER III

#### TELLING THE STORY

Our entire family knows exactly where to find her, on her front porch. On a warm day, she sits in a purple rocking chair with high-waisted drawstring shorts and just a bra. She is the leader of our family, the grandmother, the aunt, the best cook, the Queen. My cousins and I have spent hours on this doorstep, eating watermelon with our hands, playing “school” on the porch but most importantly, most memorably, sharing stories. My Aunt Clara has shared her story with me countless times. Storytelling is more than natural to American Indian families and communities; it is our way of communicating, sharing ourselves, and sharing our histories (Smith, 1999, p. 19).

As an American Indian, the implications of research within the American Indian community are scary, to say the least. The history of my people is wrought with non-American Indian researchers who have taken advantage of our communities, our histories, and our stories (Smith, 1999, p. 1). Research within American Indian communities has molded many of the deficit mindsets and negativity that have bred disappointment, horror stories, and atrocity. The “travellers’ stories” (Smith, 1999, p. 8) are often the premise of the written history of American Indian tribal nations. Our timelines begin at ‘discovery’ and they tell a story painted through the eyes of an outsider. My journey as an American Indian scholar has been mangled with a constant battle of meaning as it relates to claiming “the space of educational research” (Grande,

2014, p. 2). As presented by Grande (2014), I also wonder, “is it possible to engage the grammar of empire without replicating its effect?” (p. 3). Can I conduct research through a process of defamiliarization (Kaomea, 2003, p. 15), allowing myself to dig beneath the layers of colonialism and assimilation that have taught me that my community is the root of our own problem? Thus, this work is founded in the work of critical theory and decolonization tied together through the lens of Tribal Critical Theory and Red Pedagogy (Brayboy, 2005; Grande, 2015).

As a member of the Lumbee tribe, I believe that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 1979). This story transcends research and therefore transcends the tools that have worked to dismantle my community. The tools that will rebuild and revitalize my community will be the tools we know. Valued for their ability to “create their own bonds, represent cohesion, shared understanding and meanings” (Delgado, 1989, p. 229), the stories of American Indian tribal nations surpass the idea of simple entertainment. The stories of my people are critical to both our survival and our liberation (Delgado, 1989, p. 229). The humor in my uncle's childhood stories bring good medicine, the wisdom in my aunt’s marriage tales bring understanding, and the life stories of my mother bring a perspective to a tale that has long only been told from the white perspective. Serving a dual purpose, our stories both serve as a means of self-preservation as well as a means of lessening our own subordination (Delgado, 1989, p. 238). Our therapy is to tell our story (Delgado, 1989, p. 238). The beauty of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina is not held in our statistics or in our timelines, our glory is held in our stories. This is how I found this story.

## **“Who’z Ya People?”**

A journey to Robeson County, North Carolina is always met with a common phrase, “Who’z ya people?” Grandmas, grandpas, aunts, and uncles search diligently to make a connection to those they meet. No matter your age, you know what to say when this question arises. It’s a skill, a talent, and a part of our culture. Mr. Reggie walked over to the pool where I was swimming with my friends, his granddaughter introduced us all and his next question prompted a family tree recitation for us all. “Now, who’z some of your people?” We knew that based on his age, our answer should begin with the recitation of the names of grandparents followed, only if necessary, by the names of our parents. Of course, it’s not enough to simply state a name but often explicating where they grew up and possibly even their spouse. Our culture yearns for connection through stories, through life, and even through family trees. “Oh yeah, I know Mrs. Marie!” he squealed as my friend told him who her grandmother was and where she was from, “Tell her Mr. Reggie said hello.” Identifying ourselves as members of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina connects us not only to our sense of place but also to our sense of selves. This sense of self-identification and connection worked to not only identify participants for my work but also helped them to connect and tell their story.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

What are the educational experiences of Lumbee Tribal young adults ages 18-26?

- What educational barriers do Lumbee Tribal young adults face?

- What strategies have Lumbee Tribal young adults used to overcome educational barriers?
- What educational successes have Lumbee Tribal young adults celebrated?
- What helped facilitate those successes?

### **Who, Where & How: Research Design**

Called forth to share our family story with the meeting of any new face in Robeson County, Lumbee Tribal young adults hold a precarious space in our tribal community. Following a generation of grandparents who lived through segregation and helped establish the educational system for local Lumbee families and parents who serve as educators, tribal members, and preachers, the next step for our future is often lost to those who have fought for a system that in so many ways still fails our students. Utilizing a basic qualitative study approach, I conducted face-to-face interviews with Lumbee tribal young adults ages 18-26 in order to hear their stories of educational success as well as the stories of the barriers they have faced. Qualitative research allows the researcher the opportunity to “make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Through the collection of interviews on the personal experiences of Lumbee tribal youth and the successes and barriers of their educational careers, I present their stories as a collectively powerful tool that will alter the future of education for future generations of Lumbee tribal students.

## **Study Population**

In order to participate in the study, Lumbee tribal young adults were either enrolled or non-enrolled members of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. My decision to accept either as participants is based on the notion that one's cultural membership is not proven or more factual based on one simply having been enrolled based on requirements mandated by the colonizing government. The homogenous sampling (Glesne, 2016, p. 51) of participants had constraints based only on age, self-proclaimed membership within the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, and county of residence.

While the Lumbee tribe often calls Robeson County home, surrounding counties are also home to Lumbee tribal members. Lumbee tribal members also call Scotland County, Hoke County, Robeson County, and Cumberland County home. An interest questionnaire (Appendix A) was shared via Facebook and was also shared with email listservs by various community leaders in order to garner interest from Lumbee tribal young adults. The interest questionnaire was released on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and by November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016 had garnered 45 interested participants. Due to time constraints as well as human capital constraints, I chose to interview 12 participants with hopes of equally representing Hoke, Scotland, Cumberland, and Robeson Counties with four participants each. Of the 45 interested participants, one was from Cumberland County, five were from Hoke County, two were from Scotland County, thirty-three were from Robeson County and four were from counties other than the four chosen to participate. Two of the interest participants were also over the age of 26 and thus did not meet the criteria. Thus, the interest questionnaire gave me thirty-nine participants who met the

criteria with a clear overrepresentation of Robeson County and lower representation from the other four counties.

An immediate overview of the final thirty-nine that met the initial criteria showed that the group was composed primarily of Lumbee tribal young adults who were enrolled in or had recently graduated from institutions of higher learning whether obtaining an associate's degree or a graduate degree. The majority of the thirty-nine participants also considered themselves minimally or slightly involved in cultural activities, thus attending one to four events per year. I attribute the high representation of college educated Lumbee tribal young adults to the fact that my personal network as well as those connected to the various listservs that distributed the interest questionnaire were primarily college educated individuals. In the very nature of those that distributed the interest questionnaire the primary audience had obtained a degree past a high school diploma.

An effort to seek out a more educationally diverse group was extremely important for me. At this point, my own personal network and connections came into play. In order to seek out representation from Cumberland County and Scotland County as well as those who may have obtained only a high school diploma or a technical degree, I contacted additional tribal members for suggestions and was able to compile additional representation. In an effort to recruit a geographically diverse population while also considering age and educational attainment, I created a study interest layout chart that allowed me to review those that met my initial requirements and were willing to take part in two in-person interviews. Two interested participants stated that they did not have

time to complete the interviews, reducing the number of eligible participants to thirty-seven. This chart left me with one person from Cumberland County, five from Hoke County, two from Scotland County, and twenty-nine from Robeson County. Through further analysis, I created a “targeted” list of participants for Robeson County in hopes of getting participants of varied ages as well as those that had attended various schools in the county. An interest email was then sent to all thirty-seven eligible participants. Though all twenty-nine potential participants from Robeson County were contacted, only five responded and confirmed their ability to take part in the study. I received contact from five Robeson County participants, four Hoke County participants, one Cumberland County participant, and zero Scotland County participants. After attempting to reach participants in Cumberland and Scotland County via email, text, and social media interaction. I reached out again to local contacts to create a new list of potential participants from Cumberland and Scotland Counties. I was then able to recruit an additional Cumberland County participant and my first Scotland County participant. My final participant list was composed of five Lumbee Tribal young adults from Robeson County, four from Hoke County, two from Cumberland County, and one from Scotland County for a total of 12 participants. The individual stories of the 12 participants will be expanded on at the end of this chapter.

Consequently, the final 12 participants were recruited using a combination of online (Facebook and email) as well as in-person connections and represented the four counties in North Carolina that members of the Lumbee Tribe primarily reside and are educated in. The demographics of the 12 participants are a result of participant expressed

interest and the participants' ability to take part in the two in-person interviews. While an influx of interest was received at the onset of the study, return calls and emails were limited and additional recruitment took place through personal connections within the Lumbee tribal community.

Through face-to-face interviews I had the opportunity to build rapport with Lumbee tribal young adults while also engaging in our favorite cultural activity, storytelling. The face-to-face interviews were structured into two separate sessions, each lasting approximately an hour. Due to time and scheduling constraints, some participants chose to join both of their sessions into one larger session and answer all questions at once. Only one participant was unable to complete the second portion of their interview. While eleven of the participants took part in their interviews singularly with me, one participant had her mother present for both interviews. The reason for this is that the participant's mother drove her to our interview location and she was also intrigued by the work I was conducting and was interested in the interview her daughter would be taking part in.

The semi-structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 645) took place in various locations in order to ease the burden on participants. While navigating the questions (Appendix B), the participants had the opportunity to open-endedly share their story. My choice of semi-structured interviews allowed me the opportunity to analyze the data without the imposition of prior categorization "that may limit the field of inquiry" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 653) but still allowed me to utilize previous research and literature as a basis for analysis.

A focus group was also conducted with four out of the 12 participants. Etta, Shelby Jane, Callie and Louise took part in the focus group, all representing distinct elementary, middle and high schools. The focus group questions (Appendix C) allowed the participants as well as myself, to further explore their educational experiences and to expand upon their stories. An invitation to participate in the focus group was extended to all twelve participants. Participants completed a Doodle poll based on their availability. The date and time was chosen based on the date and time the most participants could attend. The focus group participants were chosen based on their availability. At the time of the focus group, three participants lived approximately two hours away from the proposed location of the focus group and let me know they would be unable to participate. Other prior engagements such as work and evening classes prevented other participants from joining the focus group.

Each face-to-face interview as well as the focus group were transcribed by me in order to maintain the nuances and remain true to the Lumbee dialect throughout the transcription.

### **Data Analysis**

A critical part of telling the story of Lumbee Tribal youth and coding the transcribed interviews was the use of “in vivo coding” (Glesne, 2016, p. 197), meaning the code was taken directly from what the participants said themselves (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). Maintaining the traditional Lumbee language in the coding aided in best understanding, analyzing, and telling the story of Lumbee tribal adults as a way to not

only share our traditional language but to also decolonize the boundaries of expected “proper English.”

I completed the transcription of each interview in an effort to stay true to the Lumbee dialect. I feared that a non-Lumbee transcriber would have likely missed critical language nuances. The coding of the data was also completed manually. During transcription, I had the opportunity to precode. Precoding, as posited by Saldaña (2009, p. 16) was conducted by “circling, highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring rich or significant participant quotes or passages that strike you” (Boyatzis, 1998 as cited in Saldaña, 2009, p. 16). This proved to be a powerful tool for supportive quotes, chapter titles, and section headings as I began writing. After a complete transcription of each interview as well as the focus group, I reviewed the data for each participant in its individuality, not seeking to connect it to the stories of the larger group. As a novice researcher and as suggested by Saldaña (2009, p. 15) I sought to code every part of the data that I collected. Throughout this reading I coded the data using in vivo coding, pulling out the words and thoughts of each participant directly. As I reviewed the data of each participant, I did so with my primary research questions in front of me to focus my coding and analysis (Saldaña, 2009, p. 18), seeking to pull out both the answers to those questions as well as any outlying questions, comments or points of interest that expanded on the story of the academic success of Lumbee students or the barriers they faced.

My initial coding was, as defined by Saldaña (2009, p. 19), “lumper” coding. “Lumper” coding allowed me to provide a broad, holistic representation of a set of data. This way of coding felt natural to me but then also allowed me to go back to my data for

second and third rounds to provide sub-categories to these codes. Saldaña (2009) presents the alternative of “splitting” the data, which “splits the data into smaller codable moments” (p. 19). This way of coding overwhelmed me as I tried to take the various sub-codes and revert them to larger categories.

Understanding that the work of coding contrasting data naturally had an effect on what data was coded first, second, third, etc. (Saldaña, 2009, p. 18), I found myself revisiting the individual interviews multiple times, reflecting on pieces of information from other participant stories, and seeking those similarities or differences amongst the narratives. Upon reviewing the data singularly, I then pulled the codes of each participant together and began to contemplate the ways in which they came together into common categories. These categories then gave birth to themes that were a part of the larger story presented by the participants. Once themes had been decided upon, I then revisited each participant's story to ensure that any relevant information related to the decided upon themes had found its way into my final data analysis document, again, an effort to ensure that these stories were portrayed just as they had been portrayed to me, with no missing pieces.

While inducing themes from the text and utilizing the language of the participants (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 780) was fore fronted as critically important throughout my data analysis, two other ideas also helped to direct my coding and data analysis. Saldaña (2009, p. 18) presented a question that initiated my interest in this work and has been a guiding question throughout my research question development, proposal, and has continued to be a guiding force throughout my coding and interview process, “What

strikes you?” This question allowed me to creatively, passionately, and curiously explore the stories of my participants. This question provided the opportunity to delve deeper than I normally would have into both the questions posed to participants and the data that I coded. The final guiding part of this coding and data analysis came from Saldaña (2009, p. 28-29) and his call for the “Necessary Personal Attributes for Coding,” one of which resonated more with me than any other. Saldaña (2009) states that throughout this work, “you need to be rigorously ethical” (p.29). For my work, for my people, for Indigenous research, this is not only important but mandatory. Saldaña (2009) simplifies the idea of being “rigorously ethical” (p. 29) to simply being honest. I find his words around the topic of being rigorously ethical worth quoting at length,

it implies that you will always be: rigorously ethical with your participants and treat them with respect; rigorously ethical with your data and not ignore or delete those seemingly problematic passages of texts; and rigorously ethical with your analysis by maintaining a sense of scholarly integrity and working hard toward the final outcomes (Saldaña, 2009, p. 29).

My dedication to being rigorously ethical throughout this process pushed me to a depth of coding and analysis that I hoped would present the story of my participants and their educational experiences in a way that not only honored their story but also presented it in its entirety to the reader. A part of telling their story is more than presenting codes, categories, and themes, a major part of their story is introducing them to you in their own individuality.

## **Trustworthiness**

Research within American Indian communities has a history of presenting the story from a perspective that does not include the voice of the American Indian participants in its discussion and analysis. Throughout this work I tried passionately to counter that narrative through the use of member checks. Participants had the opportunity to review the stories presented in this study for the accuracy of understanding and presentation. For example, in the following section, each participant is described in a short paragraph to give additional background. Each participant had the opportunity to review this paragraph for accuracy after it was completed. Any necessary edits and suggestions from the participants were made.

Participants will also be reviewing this dissertation in its entirety prior to its submission so that any necessary edits can be made to ensure that the stories they shared are presented truthfully and honestly.

## **The Participants**

My girls and I have taken a weekend trip to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and after wings and fries for dinner, we mosey back home and slip into our pajamas. After hours of laughing and talking, we hardly realize that it's 3:00 a.m. We have spent the last few hours catching up, sharing stories, getting updates, and reminiscing on good times. I found that this image truly encompassed my experience with my 12 participants. Asked to share their stories and their lives with me, our conversations were lively, passionate, and enthralling. Recounting the diverse stories of the 12 participants serves two purposes. For the non-Lumbee reader, the opportunity to understand more about life in

Hoke, Scotland, Robeson, and Cumberland Counties and for the Lumbee reader, the opportunity to not only connect to the participants but also validate the work presented in this study. In following chapters, the stories of the 12 participants will be pulled together in powerful themes that resonated throughout the conversations, however, in this section, I hope to remind the reader that each participant has a story. While their stories resonate enough to create larger narrative, these are all unique individuals.

As I recount the powerful stories of the 12 participants in this work, there is a truth that must be mentioned here, a truth that I was made more and more aware of as their stories unveiled, a truth that even my participants brought to light in our focus group. While all efforts had been taken to represent Lumbee young adults in terms of geographical diversity and educational diversity, an overwhelming amount of my participants were college educated. While their stories and barriers are real and poignant, the stories of Lumbee tribal young adults who I am not able to reach make this work all the more critical. (Appendix D: Participant Information List)

### **Robeson County Participants**

**Etta.** Known for her fabulous hair and contagious smile, throughout her interview, Etta, 24, is pensive and patient with her responses. Born and raised in Robeson County, more specifically in Lumberton, North Carolina, Etta's narrative is a powerful story of a Lumbee student who excelled academically within a tri-racial (African American, White, and American Indian) school but often found herself one of the few American Indian students in advanced placement and honors courses. The critical relationships she shared with the few Lumbee educators at her school helped her

to not only overcome the hardship of losing a parent but also provided her the academic support she needed when applying to a prestigious university. While obtaining admission to a top school in North Carolina was one of her greatest successes, the academic difficulties she faced while there brought to light one of the greatest barriers in her K-12 educational career, the lack of rigor within the K-12 curriculum.

Etta easily recounts valuable relationships she had with American Indian and non-American Indian educators alike that played a role in her K-12 success as well as her comfort in a classroom where she was not equally represented. These relationships allowed her to share her unique perspective as a Lumbee student while additional outside opportunities such as the Native American Student Association (NASA) and the North Carolina Native American Youth Organization (NCNAYO) allowed her the opportunity to further explore her identity.

**Louise.** Louise, 26, has a smile that is not easily forgotten and positive vibes that often emanate to those around her. Louise was born and raised in Robeson County in a town called Shannon. Again, often only one of two or three American Indian students in her class, Louise found herself in advanced placement and honors courses where she often felt misunderstood and frustrated. Louise's connection to her community is a longstanding thread that has shaped many of her decisions. What began as an advice column in her high school newspaper led to a call to continue to serve those in her community in various ways. While away at college, Louise felt the strong call of her community and, after graduating with her Master's degree, returned home in order to share her knowledge. Her return to her community has made her hyper aware of the lack

of resources that also plagued her K-12 education. Though the limited opportunities and resources led to a bigger adjustment for Louise when she entered college, a critical part of who she was as a Lumbee student pushed her to success, her resiliency.

**Hubert.** There are some people that “never meet a stranger”, an ode to their friendliness and ability to hold a conversation with absolutely anyone. This is a defining part of Hubert, 21. A familiar face in Robeson County, Hubert finds a friend wherever he goes and has connections all across Robeson County. Hubert was born and raised in Pembroke, North Carolina and shares his story of attending elementary, middle, and high school with a teacher and student population that looked and sounded just like he did, Lumbee.

Throughout his K-12 educational experience, Hubert took advantage of various opportunities offered through the educational system as well as through the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. Whether volunteering at the Lumbee Tribe’s Boys and Girls Club or receiving tutoring through his high school, Hubert understood the value of a high school education for what it could afford him in the future. A future that he knew many of his ancestors did not have access to. When faced with a serious medical issue in high school, Hubert narrated the story of support he received from his teachers and Lumbee community members as they came together to raise funds to support him and his mother. His story of perseverance against all odds is grounded in one foundational part of Lumbee culture, relationships. As Hubert continues to find his path after leaving the community college to join the workforce in Robeson County, Lumbee tribal support continues to play a critical role in his journey.

**Callie.** As my last participant interview, Callie, 25, sat at my dinner table recounting her story as I mentally began drawing connections between her educational experiences and those who had similar stories to hers. Born and raised in the heart of the Lumbee Tribe, Pembroke, NC, just like Hubert, Callie's educational interactions were all with educators and students who were culturally just like her. While taking full advantage of all that her school had to offer from advanced courses to sports and clubs, once she went off to college, Callie came face-to-face with the reality that she was ill prepared for college. Callie's greatest success, being accepted into her top choice university, had led her to the realization of her greatest barrier, her school system lacked resources and opportunity to prepare her for success at her chosen university.

Though she did not recognize various barriers until going off to college, her strength in overcoming this barrier was primarily supported by the Lumbee community she developed while off at college. Her ability to overcome this barrier was also aided by the fact that her family prioritized her educational goals above anything else, thus motivating her to push hard and do her best while away from home.

**Ander.** Ander's, 24, path to his current place in life was one with a few twists and turns that found some of their roots in a K-12 educational experience where he felt like he simply did not know what was out there after high school. Ander's educational career in Robeson County found him surrounded by familiar faces from both students and educators, a familiarity that often left him unchallenged and unmotivated within the classroom. Supported in high school by an American Indian counselor, Ander felt like he was only given direction and advice on one journey, apply to a four-year college and go.

As the first in his family to attend college, this in itself began his greatest success. Navigating a path from high school to college, to the work force, back to a technical program, Ander questioned the lack of information he received concerning post-secondary opportunities.

Though the information he received was limited, Ander's own drive to overcome the situation he had seen replayed in his community and family over and over pushed him to success. Building on his support system of family and friends, Ander was able to find a path that was right for him.

### **Scotland County Participant**

**Purcell.** Purcell's passion for Lumbee tribal culture and history vibrated throughout our entire conversation. His ability to weave his tribal knowledge throughout the conversation showed that he was not only passionate but also knowledgeable. Purcell, 22, shared his unique story of being raised in Robeson County but attending school in Scotland County. His experience in Scotland County schools, where there was a small population of American Indian students, was often marred by various stereotypes that he sought daily to overcome. Purcell remarked frequently of his connection to Robeson County as "home" in spite of the fact that he doesn't currently live there.

A critical part of his story was being the first American Indian to graduate as Salutatorian from his high school. His success within Scotland County schools was clouded by the lack of Indian Education within his school thus rendering American Indian resources hard to reach. Despite being one of the few American Indians in his high school, Purcell worked diligently too not only learn about his culture but to share

that culture with others. From orchestrating various American Indian presentations, to starting a Native American Student Association, Purcell persistently sought out his identity in a school system that often ignored who he was.

### **Cumberland County Participants**

**Marion.** A testament to the role that families often play in the lives of Lumbee youth, Marion's mother joined us as we began to discuss her K through 12 educational journey in the Cumberland County school system. Heavily involved in various American Indian youth leadership groups, Marion's, 18, passion for her culture and the lack of representation that she had dealt with was a guiding light for our entire conversation. A conversation that we both quickly realized could fill more space than our 2 hours allowed.

Attending schools with a limited number of American Indian students, Marion worked diligently to stay involved and learn about her culture through her involvement in extracurricular activities. Sadly, Marion can also recount multiple situations in which her identity as an American Indian and as a member of the Lumbee tribe was mocked and diminished within the classroom. Her dedication to remaining connected to the tribal community in spite of living in an urban setting was not always looked upon favorably by educators who often questioned her absence due to cultural activities. Marion could vividly describe educators who sought to learn more about her culture and those who instead sought to penalize her for who she was. It was this culture of punishment that created one of the greatest barriers for her in high school. Her involvement in a mentoring program with an un-supportive guidance counselor who was constantly putting

her down left Marion frustrated. However, her resilience and determination, character traits that she quickly defined as Lumbee tendencies, allowed her to overcome and succeed.

**Bazie.** Cumberland County afforded Bazie, 24, educational opportunities that many in the central tribal community are often not aware of. The IB program at her high school allowed her to take advanced level courses that not only allowed her to succeed in high school but also helped her achieve her greatest success, becoming the Valedictorian of her graduating class. While accomplishing this goal is great in itself, Bazie did so as an American Indian at a high school where there were only a handful of other students that looked like her.

While blossoming academically, Bazie faced her own challenges as she tried to understand her own identity as an American Indian in a school where she was not largely represented. Surrounded by friends who often had generations of privilege, Bazie became aware of her greatest barrier, the lack of generational knowledge her family members had concerning the world of higher education. The scope of her family's understanding as it relates to higher education was limited and continues to barricade Bazie from discussing her current law school experience in depth with her grandmother. However, Bazie continues to share her stories and success with her family members in a way that they can manage and understand. No matter their lack of understanding, their support and love for her success is undying and the true motivation behind all that she does.

## **Hoke County Participants**

**Ben James.** Arguably one of the quietest and reserved of all 12 participants, Ben James, 22, was born and raised in Hoke County, approximately 20 minutes from the tribal center of Pembroke. Ben James' often found himself motivated by his internal desire to show others that Lumbee students could achieve and move up in the world. It was this internal drive that allowed him to overcome various barriers in spite of not having any prominent support at school. Often finding himself flourishing in classes that provided more hands-on opportunities, Ben James' was able to find that experience in the Automotive program at his high school and in a certificate program following high school. Otherwise, Ben James faced the barrier of simply keeping up and maintaining his academic record. Ben James remarked on his connection to home and feeling homesick when he was away obtaining his certificate. His story signified the place-based connection that Lumbee tribal members feel to their homelands.

**Shelby Jane.** An expert juggler, Shelby Jane, 26, cooked dinner for her family, gave her son a snack, and answered my questions without missing a beat. Her story, unique from the other participants, weaves a tale of a young mother who stood in the face of stereotypes and statistics and dared not to let them win. Pregnant at 18 and a senior in high school, our conversation had one primary vein, the support of family and friends in the face of adversity. Whether discussing her greatest success, graduating while pregnant, or her greatest barrier, facing stereotypes, Shelby Jane was able to point to a support system of friends and family members that were always there. Throughout her

educational experience, her help and support came primarily from the Lumbee community and more often than not, outside of the educational system.

Throughout her educational experience, the critical relationships that she built with Lumbee educators would provide a sense of relief and support when she faced stereotypes in high school that often painted Lumbee students as “dumb” and “troublemakers.” These same relationships provided essential resources when she found out that she was pregnant and would have to make immediate plans to ensure the security of her and her unborn son.

**Georgia.** Her one-year old son played with balloons in my kitchen as we skipped between googling at how cute he is to navigating the truth behind Georgia’s, 23, greatest success of realizing the leader that she can be. Beginning elementary school in Hoke County meant that Georgia went to school with a large American Indian population but that population quickly diminished when she matriculated up to middle and high school in Hoke County. Seeking to learn more about her culture in order to share it with others, Georgia was encouraged to take leadership roles in various American Indian organizations. It was this encouragement that not only led to an increased knowledge of her identity but also her greatest success, realizing the potential she has as a leader. This encouragement catapulted Georgia into various extracurricular opportunities that helped to strengthen her leadership skills and impart in her the ability to share her culture with American Indians and non-American Indians alike.

While a fellow American Indian educator at her school fanned her passion for her culture and leadership, Georgia questioned the lack of cultural discussions throughout her

educational experiences. Though embarrassed by her lack of knowledge in high school, she felt supported enough to step outside of her comfort zone and explore a part of herself that had yet to find its presence in the classroom.

**Cecil.** Cecil, 26, gushes about all of the opportunities he received as an American Indian student while in the Hoke County school system. Often taking full advantage of the Indian Education program, the Educational Talent Search program, and the school Native American Student Association, Cecil felt as if the opportunities afforded to American Indian students by these programs were truly invaluable. While the opportunities to go on college visits and attend leadership conferences were important, a powerful thread in his story is also the value of the relationships he built with those who worked in the school and supported American Indian students.

Cecil's greatest success was graduating with plans to attend college. Supported by his friends, family, and educators, he graduated but did not finish his college degree. While every participant's story is composed of two parts to share their success and their barrier, unfortunately the greatest barrier in Cecil's life is a story I am unable to share. Shortly after our first interview, Cecil was incarcerated and unable to complete his second interview. However, the valuable stories he shared throughout his initial interview will be woven into this work. I end with Cecil's story for a reason.

Cecil was a good student. Academically gifted, A/B Honor Roll, enrolled in Honors and college courses during his high school career, and now, incarcerated. While there will always be stories of success in our communities, all too often, the stories of failure hit close to home for the Lumbee community.

The following chapters provide insight into the academic and personal lives of Lumbee tribal young adults that has yet to be presented in current literature. Chapter four, “The Strengths in the Lumbee Tribal Community”, discusses the strengths that participants identified within the Lumbee community. These strengths found their roots in the connection to home as well as other prominent aspects of Lumbee culture such as food, community, and church. Alternatively, chapter five, “‘It Wasn’t Supposed To Be Me’: Overcoming Barriers”, presents themes relevant to the barriers that students faced within the educational system. These barriers ranged from stories about fighting stereotypes to a lack of opportunities and resources within their school system. In conclusion, Chapter six, “The Vision”, seeks to begin to answer, “what can we do to support Lumbee tribal students in the K-12 educational system?” This work does not set out to provide a culminating answer to this question. In its limited breadth and depth, that is an impossible task. However, this work does seek to give space to the Lumbee tribal young adults in an academic arena that has long rendered them invisible. Providing an open door to young Lumbee scholars who do not find their voice, their space or their stories in the world of academia, I hope that this work, along with the work of my fellow Lumbee peers in the world of academia, begins to open that door.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE STRENGTHS IN THE LUMBEE TRIBAL COMMUNITY

It's Saturday, July 8th, 2017. The parade in Pembroke, North Carolina just ended and the golf carts make their way down the street to cruise. Everyone is out and about in spite of the 90-degree weather. A parade, a powwow, a car show, vendors, a pageant, it's Lumbee Homecoming. For two weeks, members of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina make their way back to Pembroke, North Carolina for the annual Homecoming festivities. Families are gathered for pool parties and cookouts. Fireworks bring everyone out on a warm Saturday night.

I make my way down the street in front of the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, drenched in sweat and smiling from ear to ear. I stop about every 10 feet to greet a cousin, an aunt, a sorority sister or friend. I get updates on the lives of those I don't see daily as they then wait patiently for their update on my life. There is something invigorating about the environment. Despite the fact that I was born in Hoke County, in that moment I am at home.

Like a pulsating vein running throughout the voices of all my participants, it was clear that the notion of "home" played a huge role in the lives of Lumbee tribal young adults. Whether identifying the key aspects of Lumbee culture or telling the story of their connection, the power of place constantly arose. Along with the power of home and the strength in place, the role that relationships played within the lives of Lumbee tribal

young adults were also apparent. The strengths within the Lumbee tribal community that supported the academic achievement of Lumbee tribal young adults were found in those relationships, in deeply rooted aspects of Lumbee tribal culture, in inherent ways of being, and in various resources that have been established to help American Indian students achieve. “Home”, family, and community arose as a sense of comfort and security.

In this chapter, a deep dive into the strengths of the Lumbee tribal community will be presented as shared by the participants. First, a foundational discussion around place-based identity will be presented to share the connection that each participant feels to “home”. Not only the foundation for a physical place of being, “home” for the participants was also a place of refuge, a safe place where participants could be true to who they were as Lumbee young adults. Tightly knitted into the connection to “home,” the Lumbee tribe of North Carolina shares a distinct cultural identity. The unique dialect, the traditional food, large tribal gatherings, and various symbols have made members of the Lumbee tribe both easily recognizable by non-Lumbee’s as well as proud of their distinct culture. Most prominently within this chapter and within the findings of this research study, an in-depth discussion of the power of relationships amongst members of the Lumbee tribe and tribal students will be discussed and presented as one of the most contributing factors to academic and personal success for the participants.

### **Place-Based Identity**

The location of the Lumbee Tribe, centrally located in Robeson County, North Carolina has long been its defining factor. This factor was again supported as

participants sought to describe Lumbee tribal culture as well as working to decipher what Lumbee tribal culture meant to them. The radiating answer, community and family all centered on “home.” Pointing out that a critical aspect of Lumbee culture was place-based, both Etta and Purcell identified the power of the connection to location for Lumbee people. Purcell went on to explain that even though Robeson County may not be his physical household, “Robeson County will always be my home.”

The connection to home was a strong pull for those who went away from their “home” to attend college. Etta, Louise, Ben James, Bazie, Ander, Purcell, Georgia and Callie poignantly assert their passion to return home upon either finishing their technical, undergraduate or graduate degrees. Louise, born and raised in Robeson County, talked about the “innate” feeling of wanting to return back home, “it was just a calling, you know, home is calling you.”

Louise was not the only participant who felt the realities of this innate feeling to return home once she had completed her education. While completing a nine-week course approximately two hours from home, Ben James returned home every weekend to “stay connected.” Etta shares that the return home for many Lumbee Tribal members is often how they were raised, important not necessarily for the individual member but for the understanding that generations and generations of Lumbee Tribal members have remained in their tribal communities. Assuredly, Purcell proclaims that it’s much more than a connection to a particular location but “it’s that connection to the heart.” While five participants called Robeson County home, the tribal center of Pembroke, North Carolina was only the geographic home for two of the participants. When asking about

their “home” by non-Natives, answering Robeson County suffices. However, when asked by a fellow Lumbee tribal member, more explanation is needed. A discussion of “where you from” in Robeson County is met with a myriad of descriptions related to family land, popular eating places, and back roads as a result of Robeson County’s size. Etta, knowing my familiarity with the Robeson County area, defines her home as “Lumberton, specifically the Tanglewood area” while Louise shares her home as the small community of Shannon. While the Lumbee tribe is largely concentrated in Robeson County, smaller communities of Lumbee tribal members, often family members, are found throughout the county and provide additional place-based identity and ways of association for tribal members. The connection to the tribal center for Robeson County residents was clear; however, the connection to Robeson County for participants outside of the Robeson County lines took a few more twists and turns.

### **Finding Home Across County Lines**

Spanning four counties, for all participants “home” was defined both as the place where they currently reside as well as the place where their families originated. While the central location for the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina is known to be Robeson County, more specifically Pembroke, North Carolina, some participants who lived outside of the county lines of Robeson County had a distinct view of their tribal community. When asked about their “Lumbee community” each participant drew connections to Robeson County but those outside of Robeson County had stories that connected them to various tribal communities, distinct communities in which they had found their “home” outside of Robeson County.

Bazie, born and raised in Cumberland County, had various circles that comprised her Lumbee community. As an only child to a mother who was a member of the Lumbee tribe and a father who was Caucasian, Bazie defined her closest “Lumbee community” as those who lived geographically close to her. This family included her mother, grandmother, and close aunts and uncles. Another unique aspect of Bazie’s community was the urban organization and tight-knit community of Lumbee’s in Cumberland County. “It was a very tight knit community especially in Cumberland County because it was so small and it kind of seemed like everybody knew everybody kinda thing”, Bazie relates. Thus, in spite of their small numbers and distance from the perceived tribal center, which is approximately 45 minutes, tribal members in Cumberland County still developed a uniquely close-knit community with each other.

Outside of those geographically close to her, Bazie had another circle that she defined as her “Lumbee community.” The story of this circle was one that had been relayed to me many times. Bazie’s second circle, an extension of her mother’s family was located in Chadbourn, North Carolina. To those familiar with the indigenous populations in North Carolina, it is known that Chadbourn, located in Columbus County, North Carolina is home to the Waccamaw Siouan tribe. Chadbourn is also known for their strawberry farms. Leaving Maxton, North Carolina, another small town in Robeson County, to seek better economic opportunities, Bazie’s family found work and economic stability in the strawberry farms of Chadbourn. They had remained there ever since. “I felt at home when I was there,” Bazie recalls visits to Chadbourn.

Finding her home in Cumberland County as well, Marion also had various intricate circles that she referred to as her “Lumbee community.” Though residing in Cumberland County with a small Lumbee population, life in her neighborhood was one in which she was surrounded by Lumbee family members, a similar phenomenon that occurs in Robeson County. Until she was about eight years old, Marion’s experience surrounded by her family in Cumberland County had been a defining aspect of her interactions with the Lumbee community. However, entering school and realizing the lack of American Indian students, Marion began to seek additional outlets to connect with the American Indian and Lumbee community. This new community came in the form of the Native Carolina Native American Youth Organization (NCNAYO). The North Carolina Native American Youth Organization is a network of American Indian youth across the state of North Carolina who work together to conduct an annual conference as well as community service projects in various tribal communities. It is run as an organization distinct from the educational system and is supported by community volunteers as well as the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs through grant funding. Either through their school based student association or as individuals, there are various ways to be active. American Indian students serving on the executive committee of the organization meet each month in various tribal communities to plan the annual summer conference. This network of American Indian youth allowed Marion to stay connected to her culture as well as other American Indian youth her age in spite of growing up in an area with limited access to American Indian youth like herself. As relationships developed and bonds formed, this network quickly became another tribal

community that Marion comfortably referred to as family. Marion's close knit family found their geographic home in Cumberland County however, deeper exploration showed that her roots extended into Robeson County as well, the home of many distant family members.

Interestingly, the pattern of tight-knit tribal communities within counties with smaller Lumbee tribal populations was common. As they shared their stories, I soon realized that Cecil, Ben James, and Georgia, though varied in ages, were all from the same community in Hoke County. A community, again, comprised largely of Lumbee tribal members. Communities that consisted of families and extended families that have lived near each other for generations. Attending the same schools and churches, the intricate circles of Lumbee communities were sprinkled throughout the counties. Just as was common in Robeson County, local identifiers were used to narrow down one's home from "Hoke County" to South Hoke, a particular area in the county that is home to various tribal members. And again, just as was the case with Cumberland County, participants would often draw connections across the county lines to extended relatives in Robeson County.

Whether Lumbee tribal members left Robeson County generations before or whether there has always been a natural extension of the tribal community in various surrounding counties, their ability to find each other and create distinct mini-tribal communities is fascinating. The mini-tribal communities that many of the participants referred to had been lands held in Lumbee families for generations. Lands that meant more than a place to stay, a place to reside, but lands that fostered that deep-rooted

connection to home. It was these lands and this “home,” each with its individual meaning to each participant that provided so much more than a street address. This “home” served as a sense of comfort, relief, and safety. This “home” filled a void for participants who did not see themselves represented in the world around them. “Home” is the missing puzzle piece that often brings participants back no matter how far they roam.

### **“We Have to Return Home”: A Safe Place**

The connection to place and “home” for the participants was not only warranted because of an ingrained and innate feeling but also sought after as a sense of comfort. Though living and working out of town, Ander’s return home provides a “sense of relief”. While attending a primarily white institution to receive his bachelor’s degree, Purcell shares his experiences of hiding his accent and putting up “this front or this facade” while at school and ultimately finding his “comfortable space” when he returned to Robeson County. A place where “everybody talks the same” and he was able to simply be himself. Though living in Robeson County, Purcell attended school in Scotland County where there was a significantly lower American Indian student population. His experience of going from a place of familiarity to an environment where he stood out was a constant theme throughout his educational career. Rising to the top, continually, was the comfort of returning home to Robeson County at the end of the day. The school environment did not provide Purcell with the comfort and safety that he longed for, “it’s like where do you find that balance... going home to a comfortable safe space and then going to school, where do you find your place on the spectrum?” The

comfort of “home” was the calling returning factor for most participants who wanted to return to a place to be around others who looked, sounded and acted like them. A place where they were understood without confusion. It was this understanding and comfort that often brought Callie home on the weekends. “You just needed to come back home where you felt comfortable,” a two-hour journey well worth it for a weekend surrounded by familiar faces and voices.

For those that had not gone away to college, the comfort of “home” was critical to them and part of the reason they decided to stay. Beginning college seven months pregnant, Shelby Jane knew that going away from the comforts of home would create more barriers for her and her unborn son. Thus, those remaining at home for the careers as well as their educational experiences cited the comfort of home as the primary reason for staying. Georgia, though originally planning to go off to college, always intended to return home once she was finished. While her plans changed as a senior in high school, the comfort she felt while staying at home and attending the local university was worth it. “I felt more comfortable...I’m glad I stayed home.” Home provided not only comfort but also a support system within the community that cannot be easily found in other places. As stated by Purcell, returning home to a safe space often meant that he could be himself. Purcell’s references to both his accent and his distinguishable language brought forth a discussion of the distinctive characteristics of the Lumbee people. The Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina has distinctive cultural ways of being that make them both join together as a united front but also makes them easily distinguishable in a strange crowd.

## **Defining Aspects of Lumbee Culture**

There are over 500 tribal nations in the United States of America, each with their own incomparable cultural activities and traditions. The Lumbee tribe is no different. Discussions of who the Lumbee were yielded powerful themes that resonated with each participant because they were extensions of who they were as individuals. Lumbee culture, so uniquely distinct, is not a cultural way that many can go without recognizing. The ways of being of the Lumbee tribe of North Carolina are well known to non-Lumbee's and other American Indian tribes in surrounding counties. These stories, arguably my favorite to hear, recount instances of Lumbee food, language, prominent symbols, Jesus, and of course, Lumbee Homecoming.

### **Lumbee Food**

“We’re waiting in line!” I had been waiting for nearly an hour to meet my friend for fireworks at Lumbee Homecoming; however, she had found a better place to be, in line at the local food vendors. While the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina boasts the strength of a place-based identity that brings tribal members together in a unique and powerful way, other defining aspects of the Lumbee tribal culture were shared by the participants, one of those being food. Hubert spouts a list of his favorite Lumbee delicacies, “collards, fat back, cornbread” he giggles. Lumbee families often find themselves joined together to share a meal. Distinct in their ways of cooking, the participants identified the food of the Lumbee people as one of the defining factors. Often including grape ice cream in July, chicken-n-pastry on Sunday, and collard sandwiches for Homecoming, the Lumbee people proudly proclaim their cooking skills.

Rooted in the south, the Lumbee tribe boasts delicacies that may be termed as “southern” but often have unique ways of cooking or additional ingredients that make them a Lumbee staple. Grape ice cream, a July dessert that nobody can name the origin of, is so popular in July that McDonald’s offers a grape milkshake. A milkshake you will find in only one McDonald’s location, Pembroke, North Carolina. While Lumbees have distinct ways of cooking that bring together families for large dinners and good times, the stories of recipes go far beyond any generation can often recollect. Families often find themselves eating the seasonal food that is fresh from the garden. Or better yet, food that has been stored and brought out for a meal. Frozen corn, peas, cabbage, jams, and jellies all find themselves stacked in the freezer for the next season. Though eating the food itself is a joy, many cultural Lumbee activities containing food involve its preparation. “Hog killings,” Hubert explains, “we actually go through the meat processing thing but we do it together as a family.” The process of killing, shaving, gutting, cleaning, cutting, and bagging a hog, to many may sound gruesome but to members of the Lumbee tribe is a way of living and a chance to get together as a family. Though hog killings were the opportune time to get together as a family, a visit to a Lumbee home on a Sunday afternoon at 1:00pm poignantly shows another critical aspect of Lumbee culture, religion.

### **Religion**

Intricately tied together, for many participants, when recalling their involvement in the Lumbee community, quickly referenced their church membership. The power of religion, particularly Christianity amongst the Lumbee people is not something to be overlooked. Standing outside of the Lumbee tribal government building in Pembroke,

North Carolina, a marquee flashes, at first with messages about upcoming events and then with a clearly distinguishable image of Jesus on a cross.

Louise's involvement and "strong connection" to her church was a defining aspect of her tribal involvement. "You know Lumbees are all, mostly, centered around religion and community within church." A connection that many others also referenced. Both Shelby Jane and Callie discussed their church involvement as a part of their cultural involvement, again showing the distinct ways in which Lumbee tribal members tie Christianity to the root of their tribal culture. For many, their tribal community was also their church community and in hard times, it was this church community that went above and beyond for them. Purcell, stepping outside of his comfort zone and traveling abroad while in college, was supported by his church family, "when I was abroad people at church they were sending me bottles of hot sauce and stuff and like seasoning and stuff because they were like we know that you need it and people was sending me money and stuff." It was also this religious support system that made a world of difference for Hubert during quite a tough time.

As a rising sophomore, Hubert was diagnosed with a brain tumor that took him out of school for an entire year and left him in the hospital in Chapel Hill for months. A child in a single parent home, the bills, and costs quickly racked up. To offset the costs, the community came together to host various fundraising events. Throughout the time that Hubert was in the hospital, one of the guiding forces behind the orchestration and implementation of various fundraising activities was his church. "My church had a big role." Hubert reflected on the many visits, calls, and care packages he received from his

church family during his time in the hospital as well as during his time of recovery at home.

The connection that participants felt to their churches is also a connection that many other Lumbee tribal members feel. When approached by someone new, the first question is often “who’z ya people?” quickly followed by “where do y’all church at?” To many outsiders a presumptuous question but to members of the Lumbee Tribe, again a way to connect and orient ourselves with each other as well as a way to make a connection to a place that is familiar. The connection of Lumbee people in Robeson County to the local church population is stronger than many may realize. When going into the Lumbee Tribal building to become a registered member of the Tribe, one may be asked a series of questions to ensure that one is knowledgeable of tribal history. One such question is known to be “Name some prominent Lumbee churches.” A task that is simple for most but again shows the connection between Lumbee tribal culture and religion. While food and religion are aspects of Lumbee culture that may be well known within the community, there is one aspect that absolutely everyone notices, language.

### **Language**

The Lumbee dialect is an easily distinguishable factor for those who speak the language as well as those who do not. My dialect has been the beginning of many conversations when I spend time outside of Robeson and Hoke Counties. In a collection on the Lumbee dialect, Hayes A. Locklear et. al (1996) brings to light some of the distinguishing features of the language that participants identified as a distinct description of Lumbee tribal culture. Though living aside Southern African-Americans and Whites,

the way in which Lumbee tribal members pronounce words and place them together to form sentence structures evoke a unique way of speaking (Locklear, et. al, 1996). Not only does the pronunciation and sentence formation create a way of speaking that may seem strange to outsiders, the Lumbee also evoke a vocabulary of their own. While we refer to mischievous children as “little yurkers” (Locklear et. al, 1996), a nice dress as a “frock” (Locklear et al, 1996) or male friends as “pa sacks” (Locklear et al, 1996), the Lumbee language is a dynamic part of the culture.

It is this part of culture that participants stated often set them apart when outside of the tribal community and again, this aspect that made them distinguishable as members of the Lumbee tribe. Sadly, it was also this dialect and the lack of appreciation from non-Lumbees that often also forced participants to alter their speech to something they thought more proper or appropriate when speaking to non-Lumbee’s. The comfort that many of the participants previously mentioned was tied to their ability to return to their tribal community and speak in their Lumbee dialect without further explanation or fear of judgment. Callie passionately speaks about being confronted with her Lumbee dialect outside of Robeson County. Receiving an “F” on an oral presentation, Callie was appalled at the grade and was soon told that because of her accent, she could not be understood thus the reasoning behind her failing grade. The Lumbee dialect was also made apparent to Purcell, “it’s just like when I’m at school or abroad sometimes, I feel like sometimes I have to stage like I have to stage um my vocabulary. I have to stage my accent and it’s hard but when I got home everybody talks the same, everybody uses the same vernacular so it’s nice to be able to go home.” The code switching that Callie and

Purcell mentioned and the power in the Lumbee language also tied into another key aspect mentioned by Marion. The retention of the Lumbee language for those inside the community and the ability of those to code switch when conversing outside of the community is a representation of a culture that Marion defines as “flowing”, the ability to maintain our existence in the modern world and outside of the tribal community while also navigating our cultural traditions such as maintaining our dialect. Lumbee dialect has played a major role in this flowing culture. As participants discussed their cultural challenges while living, working, and going to school outside of the community, their ability to overcome, adapt, and code switch in order to gain success was evident.

While the Lumbee dialect is misunderstood by many, the power of the language to unite tribal members has been shown many times over. Countless times I have traveled outside of the tribal community and have been confronted by other Lumbee’s who recognized my accent and immediately came over to ask me one simple question, “who’z ya people?” The Lumbee language is not the only united symbol that participants recognized; the pinecone patchwork and our traditional regalia are also important symbols for tribal members.

### **Prominent Tribal Symbols and Clothing**

While it is always easy to identify a member of the Lumbee tribe based on the language they use, participants also identified other aspects of Lumbee tribal culture that are significant. “Our artwork, as well. The pinecone patchwork, that’s essential to our place.” The value of the pinecone patchwork goes beyond a simple symbol for recognition. Again, the representation of the pinecone patchwork ties the Lumbee people

back to their “home.” Known as the “People of the Pine” because of the wealth of pine trees in the Robeson County community, the Lumbee people often adorn their jewelry, regalia (traditional American Indian clothing) and clothing with pinecone patchwork, an intricate pattern of folded fabric that resembles the bottom of a pinecone. The pinecone patchwork symbol is reminiscent of the bottom of a long leaf pinecone, a reminder of our where we come from. It is this precious design that was also adopted to adorn the regalia of Lumbee men and women. The Lumbee pinecone patchwork regalia are easily identifiable at powwows and to those familiar with the design, always signifies that the owner is a member of the Lumbee Tribe. One participant, a former Miss Lumbee titleholder, is an owner of a Lumbee pinecone patchwork regalia. The use of the pinecone patchwork and its synonymous connection to the Lumbee tribe makes it a popular sight at one of the tribes’ largest gathering, Lumbee Homecoming.

### **Tribal Gatherings**

“Whether it’s cooking in the kitchen or working in the fields, anything we do we have a crowd,” Louise often has her happiest moments in the kitchen surrounded by her family. The tight-knit community that the Lumbee tribe lives by also finds itself infiltrating communities outside of the specific tribal location. Tribal gatherings, whether within the tribal center of Pembroke, NC or outside of the tribal center were mentioned as a sense of connection and importance by all participants. One such gathering that is important for Lumbee tribal people but also many other American Indian tribes are powwows. To the non-American Indian, a powwow is a large gathering of American Indians that involves songs and dances that seek to celebrate American Indian culture.

To an American Indian attendee, a powwow is more like a large family gathering, a poignant point made by Ben James who states that he “goes to powwows to be with his family.” Powwows hold a special place in the hearts of various participants and their involvement in powwows ranged from those such as Louise who danced and attended multiple powwows to Ben James who attended one, possibly two per year. No matter their participation, when asked about their involvement in Lumbee Tribal culture, half of the participants mentioned their attendance at local powwows. Various tribes in the state of North Carolina hold annual powwows with the Lumbee holding a semi-annual powwow, one in the spring and one in the fall. Involvement and interaction while at the powwow also differed for participants. Marion often dances at powwows across the state while Hubert enjoys more of the social aspect of powwows where he gets the opportunity to speak with familiar faces that he doesn’t get to see so often. While powwows are not exclusive to Lumbee culture, they are a critical part of community building and relationship building for the Lumbee people. In order to maintain her connection to her Lumbee community while away at college, Etta recalls either returning home for powwows,

Whenever I was in Chapel Hill making it a point to you know come home whenever there were certain events going on. You know whether that was with my family or whether that was like a powwow or anything going on at home. I’m just making sure that you stay connected to the community.

Powwows helped Etta maintain her tribal connection. Powwows have also worked to build inter-tribal relationships and bonds for tribes across the state of North Carolina. Powwows across the state and particularly in Pembroke bring Lumbee tribal

members together, there is, however, one gathering that Lumbees far and wide make their way back home for, Lumbee Homecoming.

In our discussions surrounding aspects of Lumbee tribal culture, many participants made immediate mention of Lumbee Homecoming. Callie, living about one mile from where Lumbee Homecoming is held, shares the importance of Lumbee Homecoming to her, “I think it’s important because gathering together is a large component of our culture and homecoming is the largest gather we have for our tribe.” In 2017, the annual event celebrated its 49th anniversary. For forty-nine years the event has been held in Pembroke, North Carolina, the heart of the Lumbee people and has often been declared the largest tribal event east of the Mississippi. One of the most beautiful things about Lumbee Homecoming is that it is a culminating cultural event that represents the Lumbee people in so many ways. Georgia, recounting what Lumbee Homecoming means to her states, “[Lumbee Homecoming] involves thousands of Lumbee people coming together to celebrate our culture. It’s important because it’s not just a family reunion; it’s a heritage reunion. From the pageant to cruising...it’s a way for the Lumbee people to come together and show pride.” Lumbee Homecoming is held each year during the July 4th holiday. Lumbee Homecoming lasts approximately a week and a half with a myriad of events taking place throughout this time. Seeking to “showcase our historical educational, social, economic, political and cultural contributions to our communities, county, state and nation” (Lumbee Homecoming 2017, n.d.), Lumbee Homecoming is an event that brings together the city of Pembroke, the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina as well as local businesses and community members for one huge cultural

celebration. Hubert, born and raised in Pembroke, proclaimed that Lumbee Homecoming was “a very awesome thing to experience.” The cultural event pulls on multiple aspects of Lumbee tribal culture. Vendors line the streets of Pembroke selling traditional items that are often adorned with the pinecone patchwork. Food vendors set up next to the Lumbee River Developmental Association building selling collard sandwiches, barbecue sandwiches, ribs, and homemade grape ice cream, just to name a few items. The days are filled with events from art displays to celebrate and honor prominent tribal members such as Julian T. Pierce who fought for Lumbee tribal federal recognition. Various athletic events are held such as a 5K, a golf tournament, a tennis tournament as well as a basketball tournament. A week of gospel singings at local churches also take place. Throughout this week, our tribal royalty is also chosen in a set of pageants. Candidates vying for Little Miss, Junior Miss, Teen Miss, Miss, and Senior Miss Lumbee all take the stage in front of a captivated audience. The culmination of the entire week and half of events occurs on the last Saturday. A 10 am parade brings everybody into town as local businesses, tribal royalty, bands, and organizations celebrate Lumbee tribal culture. At the conclusion of the parade, tribal members and those visiting make their way over to the powwow at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke or peruse the vendors that have lined the roads. While the sun is setting low behind the tall pines, a gospel singing closes out the last events of Lumbee Homecoming as everyone finds their seats to enjoy the fireworks display. Lumbee Homecoming is a staple in our community. It brings the best parts of who we are together in an event that allows us to celebrate our culture, our heritage, and our people together. Lumbee Homecoming, or “Homecoming” as

participants referred to it, was the tribal event that personified every aspect of Lumbee Tribal culture. The ability to be together and celebrate Lumbee culture was important for Shelby Jane, “it’s the one time of the year that I feel is designated for us! It makes us feel special.” The cultural pride that Lumbee Homecoming evokes was powerful for Marion, “it involves everything important for Native people: honoring the Creator, our traditions, our elders, family and friends and delicious food, of course! It’s a sense of peace.” As a student in Cumberland County, Marion saw Lumbee Homecoming as “a way of reconnecting with my roots, my friends and family and a way to show Native and non-Natives alike about our culture.” This once a year event allowed Etta to engage in activities that only come annually, “You’ll see all types of cultural references that you don’t get to experience and indulge in except this time. I’m referring to how we talk about the pageants, the vendors and the fireworks.”

Participants could easily identify keys aspects of Lumbee Tribal culture that set them apart from other tribal nations and races. Whether it’s the Lumbee slang, the food or the pinecone patchwork, the Lumbees’ connection to home was clear. This connection to home brought forth other aspects of Lumbee culture such as the tie to religion, the communal power of food, and the simply pleasure of celebrating Lumbee culture together whether at powwows or Lumbee Homecoming. While the strengths of the Lumbee community found their roots in various aspects, from food, to church, another aspect of the Lumbee tribal community found its way weaved into every aspect of both the successes and barriers of Lumbee participants, the power of relationships.

## **Crossing County Lines: Lumbee Culture in Cumberland County**

While the defining aspects of Lumbee Tribal culture were powerful themes throughout a vast majority of the stories shared by Robeson, Hoke, and Scotland County participants, the perception presented by Cumberland County participants was unique. Throughout the sharing of their stories, Bazie and Marion did not make mention of food, religion, and language but instead their stories were reminiscent of Lumbee tribal students walking between a cultural as well as a modern world.

For Bazie being Lumbee meant,

It would be like being proud of who you are and knowing who you are despite what other people may think you are so even though I probably grew up knowing less specifically about what it means to be Lumbee, like, as a tribal member specifically I think to me it was it was knowing despite growing up in a non-Native community that I wasn't mixed as some people may think I was and knowing what it meant to Native American generally even though I didn't have like a tribal experience.

This sense of knowing who you were while existing in a place with very few American to me like how proud I am. It represents that I'm a part of something that's bigger than me and it reminds me to stay humble.” Both Cumberland County participants also relayed verbal declarations of pride in their culture. A pride that, while possibly present in Hoke, Scotland, and Robeson Counties, requires a more powerful presence in Cumberland County where the tribal representation is nominal.

Uniquely, Bazie and Marion spoke of their tribal representation and expression in a way that many may view as a blend of modern culture and traditional Lumbee culture. While Bazie was knowledgeable of powwows and traditional dancing, she also felt as if

her knowledge of the federal recognition process was apart of her Lumbee culture. The knowledge that she held of her tribal culture also played into her involvement, seeking always to be informed while also working to continuously educate her non-Lumbee peers. Marion also brought this modern side to my attention. Again, cognizant of many of the traditional aspects of Lumbee culture, her view of Lumbee culture also brought forth the realities of Lumbee students existing not only within the powwow arena but also a “Lumbee student who’s in college or a Lumbee student who’s a doctor.”

### **The Power of Relationships with Other Lumbee People**

While finding their identity rooted in their place, the Lumbee Tribal members find their backbone rooted in the strength of their community connections and the prosperous relationships that were foundational to the success of many participants. The power of this network transcends any boundaries and allows Lumbees’ who live outside of the tribal community to connect to each other in a unique way. “No matter who I meet that’s Lumbee, we may have completely different backgrounds growing up even though we’re Lumbee, but we always have the fact that we are Lumbee and there’s a solid basis that we can always connect with”, Louise has used this connection to find Lumbee friends to connect to while pursuing higher education outside of the tribal community. Again, a skill that Shelby Jane is also used to, “It doesn’t matter where I go, if I see a Lumbee, it can be outta’ state, it’s as if we knew each other all our life.” A clear show of connection and unification that ties Lumbee tribal members together.

Even while residing in Cumberland County, a county with a significantly lower population of Lumbee Tribal members, Bazie and Marion discuss the ways in which the

Lumbee tribal members formed a tight-knit community with each other. The communities that participants referred to also often involved a close relationship with family members that typically lived within close proximity to each other. Purcell and I laugh as we narrate encounters with others who find it hard to believe that our families (nuclear and extended) are “just in that one county.” Often asked if he has family anywhere else by those unfamiliar with Lumbee culture, Purcell quickly proclaims that he can easily reach his entire family in Robeson County. “That’s literally where all my family is...ours really just go to Robeson County and just stays there,” a connection to place and land that has lasted for generations and built familial and community bonds that zigzag across families and county lines. Again, showing that the connection to place and its longstanding roots have helped to develop relationships within the Lumbee community that create a mighty network of support for Lumbee tribal members.

The communal strengths of Lumbee tribal culture played a critical role in the academic success of the participants. Sharing their stories of success within the kindergarten through twelve educational systems, participants were also asked to reflect on their support system during that time. Overwhelmingly, the women within Lumbee families and American Indian educators played the most significant role. Although fathers may play a strong role in the lives of many Lumbee people, including my participants, the participants talked exclusively about their mothers. Lumbee women are known for their maternal strength and the matriarchal role they take in most families. It was clear that they also played a large role in the educational success of many of the participants. Relaying the value of Lumbee women as it relates to educational success,

most participants paid homage to their mothers, grandmothers, or aunts when it came to identifying their critical support system. “If it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t have ended up there,” Bazie, coming from a single parent home, attributes her motivation, drive, and success to her mother and her grandmother. Signified as one of her greatest motivators and encouragers, Bazie’s mother and grandmother did their best to “be on the up and up about what was going on” as it related to her educational endeavors. Bazie received support from both her grandmother and her mother who was pursuing a Bachelor's degree at the time. Her greatest success, graduating as valedictorian, is not one that she claims as singularly her own, “I think it was just as much her victory as it was mine.”

Though the strength of women in the field of education is well known, the role that Lumbee women play is often unique. In stories shared by the participants, the women in the family often held titles that spanned from mother, grandmother, and aunt to teacher, single mother, university student, and full-time employee just to name a few. All clearly knowing the power of education and its importance within their home. The support that participants received from the women in their lives also ran the gamut. While some mothers pursued higher degrees, and were able to support their children in practical hands-on ways such as helping to complete college applications and the FAFSA, other mothers and grandmothers provided moral and verbal support, encouraging their children to complete their high school education and reach higher.

Etta, losing her mother as she entered her sophomore year in high school, found critical support in a grandmother who was a former educator and an aunt who stepped in during a huge transition season. Together they navigated the waters of college and

scholarship applications. As a team, they were able to ensure that Etta applied and was accepted to the school of her dreams, the university that her mother graduated from and in doing so also secured a full-ride scholarship along the way. The hand on support that Etta received was also reminiscent of the help that Shelby Jane received from her mother. “If it wouldn't have been for my mama I wouldn't had a lot to help pay for college.” Shelby Jane’s mama’s initiative to support her daughter throughout the financial aid process was evident. Whether looking up scholarships for her daughter to apply to or calling local colleges to inquire about financial aid packages, she dedicated a huge amount of time to the scholarship application process on behalf of her daughter. A job that Shelby Jane, preparing to give birth to her first child as a college freshman, was grateful for.

Another mother who stepped up in a major way was Marion’s mother. In a single parent home, Marion’s mama played a persistent and dedicated role within her academic life. Even in elementary school, Marion recalls the expectations her mama had for her as it related to her grades, “You come home with a C on your report card, she [mama] gonna be looking at you like by the next reporting period this better be a B or a A.” Again, showing the high expectations that her mama had clearly established. Throughout her educational career, Marion dealt with a significant amount turmoil that often required the intervention of her mother. Encounters with bullies in middle school led to a school transfer that came only after persistent pushing from her mother. The support provided by Marion’s mother as she entered her first year of college was clearly present.

Attending both of our interviews, her mother sat as an attentive proud parent, passionate about her daughter's education and at the time, even seeking higher education for herself.

The matriarchy in Lumbee families is ever-present and ever powerful for the participants listed above, another such story also resonated from Hubert. As you recall, following his ninth-grade year, Hubert was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Again, the story of a single parent home pays homage to the role that women often play within the Lumbee community. Hubert's mama, with the support the local church and community, took off an extensive amount of time from work in order to support and care for Hubert during this time. The support system that surrounded Hubert during this time was not only based upon the support he received from his mother but also from her two sisters who stayed with Hubert for days on end to support his recovery. Throughout this time, the women ensured that both Hubert's physical as well as academic success were a priority. Working diligently on the partnership between the school and the hospital, Hubert was enrolled in the educational program at the hospital and able to keep up with his studies. Yet again showing the critical role that women played within the academic success of Lumbee students. The relationships within the Lumbee community and the strength that many participants drew upon from the women in their families were not only found outside of the classroom walls. Critical relationships that led to the success of the participants were also found within the school buildings in various capacities in all counties.

## **Relationships within the School System**

While participants were supported by the relationships fostered within their own homes and with their family members, participants also found the critical support they needed through key relationships they formed within their school building. Participants passionately discussed key educators within their school who played a role in supporting them throughout their educational career. No matter how far removed they were from the classroom, participants remember with great clarity those that gave them advice, motivation, encouragement, and help throughout the years. For many participants, especially those coming from homes with limited educational experience, this advice and help was pivotal. Throughout our discussion of key faculty and staff members throughout the years, one common thread was evident, participants were attentive to those faculty and staff members who truly cared and worked diligently to build a relationship with them.

**Relationships with American Indian educators.** Though identifying their schools as having limited Lumbee or American Indian faculty and staff (aside from those educated in the town of Pembroke, the tribal center), participants overwhelmingly cited those critical relationships with American Indian faculty and staff as some of the most supportive and resourceful. When asked about his support system, Ander was able to immediately recall the Youth Development Specialist at his high school. Located in schools in Robeson County, the Youth Development Specialist at various schools is employed by the Indian Education program and is there to provide additional support to American Indian students within the school system, a role that, according to participants,

has been exceedingly helpful. In this role, the Youth Development Specialist oversees various duties that include but are not limited to, monitoring “Indian student attendance... make referrals to community agencies when necessary... make home visits when necessary” (Public Schools of Robeson County: Indian Education Program, n.d.). The role of Indian Education also extended to Hoke, Cumberland, and Scotland counties in various capacities. “She was ‘bout the only one that really motivated me or pushed me,” Ander references the Youth Development Specialist in his high school that helped him to apply for college. More than simply helping him apply for college, Ander also references the relationship he had built with the Youth Development Specialist, “we had a bond...we had a friendship.” The support that Etta received from the Youth Development Specialist within her school was one that she said was “built on culture.” The shared culture also led to a relationship that allowed the Youth Development Specialist to provide support for Etta when her mother passed. The support she received extended beyond the school building in a way that showed Etta he cared. Attending her mother’s funeral services, the Youth Development Specialist continued to work with Etta upon her arrival back at school to ensure she was caught up with classes, altered her schedule to ensure success, and for the upcoming years made sure to include her on all trips to her dream college. “It was very much a relationship, a relationship built on culture like we looked out for our own people... the fact that we were Lumbee allowed us to be that much closer and then I think from there he was you know someone I often called on for whatever.” Thus, to Etta, though the Youth Development Specialist was valuable because of the relationship he worked to build with her, the initial cultural

connection they shared made this process even easier. The personnel resources provided by Indian Education allowed participants a familiar face to connect with. Participants also found these connections with other American Indian staff at their schools.

It was this initial cultural connection that brought Ben James and Georgia to a Lumbee educator in their school in Hoke County. Ben James, noticeably quiet and more reserved, felt that he had an initial connection to the teacher simply based on the fact that he knew he was Lumbee, “just by him being a Native teacher and not many teachers are Native American and it helps to get through.” Georgia also noticed this initial relationship. The relationship that was fostered on this foundation allowed her to get involved in the Native American Student Association under this Lumbee educator. Not only that, upon building a relationship, Georgia was encouraged by the educator to take on leadership roles in a school-wide and statewide capacity as a representative of American Indian youth from her county. A role that she feels she would have never obtained had she not built a relationship with the American Indian educator and been encouraged to pursue various opportunities outside of the school.

Shelby Jane’s connection to her guidance counselor at her high school was one solely founded on the connection of Lumbee identity. Though assigned a guidance counselor based on the first letter of her last name, the connection that Shelby Jane felt to the Lumbee counselor at her high school made her seek out the Lumbee counselor as opposed to the counselor she was assigned to. “She’s ours, this is our counselor,” Shelby Jane laughingly relates how she felt about the Lumbee counselor. Again, her initial sense of connection was one that she could not deny. It is also this sense of connection that

Shelby Jane is worried that her son may be lacking within his educational career, “that’s what I feel like missing for Gurney. When we were there, we had like all Native American teachers like we could relate to ’em but like now... there’s not a lot of Native American teachers out there.” Shelby Jane’s concern for her son’s connection to his educators clearly ties back to the important role that familiar Lumbee faces played for her throughout her educational career. Whether citing the guidance counselor or the American Indian studies teacher, participants sought the comfort of a familiar face when seeking advice, opportunities, and resources within their schools.

**Relationships with non-American Indian educators.** While pivotal relationships within the school were built with American Indian educators, the support system of participants that involved non-American Indians all involved educators who went above and beyond to build relationships with the participants. Again, signifying the importance of relationship building to Lumbee tribal members. Marion, having been educated in Cumberland County schools, can only recall a few American Indian teachers but can also recall non-American Indian educators who took the extra time to extend their relationship beyond that of simply checking in on academics. “She actually cared about us”, Marion relates the story of an educator who took the time to get to know her and her classmates on a personal level. An educator that she referred to as “an amazing teacher.” Showing interest in their life outside of school and her culture made all the difference in the relationship between Marion and this educator. Whether asking about powwows, seeking to learn more about regalia’s or simply asking Marion how she was doing, the effort she took to expand on their relationship outside of the classroom was easily

noticeable to Marion. Purcell's relationship with his high school counselor is one that has extended far past his high school years and is one that he still values today, "I'd also have to pay homage to one of my counselors... she helped me a lot. She actually helped me a great deal on trying to apply for college and stuff." The relationship that Purcell developed with his high school counselor, who was African American, is one that he defines as "close." Purcell maintained this relationship even after graduating, regularly speaking with his past counselor.

During the focus group discussion, Etta, Shelby Jane, Callie, and Louise thought back to their experience with non-American Indian educators. "What makes the difference is just being comfortable with the students and just finding something to connect with them," Louise, pulling on both her experiences as a Lumbee student and her current experience as an educator builds on a critical part of Lumbee culture that is important for non-American Indians to understand, the value of connection. For those participants that discussed vital relationships with non-American Indian educators, the interactions they remembered rarely included academic support but instead involved situations in which they felt genuinely cared for. Louise, though not signifying a specific non-American Indian educator states, "you had those teachers where they just made you feel like, you know, they loved you, they didn't make you feel like you were out of place." Love, of course, an intangible thing that is absolutely not a part of academic standards, makes all the difference for the Lumbee participants. At times, it was this 'love' that corrected students when they knew they were doing wrong. Etta, jokes with the focus group as she recounts a story of going to class in junior high with a hickey on

her neck and being “called out” by a white female teacher, “of course, at the time I was like this ain’t none of her business, but like at the end of the day I was kinda like okay she cares cause she knows I got a future. She knows I don’t need to be doing this mess so it made me think twice.” Etta also had another interaction with a white male teacher who again called her out “for being crazy,” “but it was just nice to have people who like knew I needed to get myself together.”

The interactions that the participants had with non-American Indian educators took trust and effort from both parties. Louise, recognizing the difference in races at her various schools, feels as if she could easily tell what non-American Indian educators were comfortable with racial differences. A prerequisite for a positive relationship was based on the comfort of the educator with the racial differences between the students and themselves. “You could tell the teachers who were comfortable with Native students and who weren’t. I think that’s what makes a difference is if you’re comfortable with other races in general.” The comfort that non-American Indian educators had with Lumbee students was felt and acknowledged by the participants. It was also this level of comfort that allowed them to either form a relationship on the bounds of trust and cultural understanding or, as will be discussed in the forthcoming chapter, caused the deterioration of trust in relationships with non-American Indian educators. Interactions with American Indian and non-American Indian educators who worked diligently to build relationships with the participants were a key aspect of the academic success. Another aspect of this success was the ability of Lumbee participants to find their place within the educational system.

### **Finding Their Place: The Value of American Indian Student Organizations**

Though the various strengths within the Lumbee community and tribe are often embedded aspects of Lumbee tribal culture, participants also brought forth other parts of their educational careers that played a role in their success, one of those facets being additional clubs and resources that were offered for American Indian students within the educational system. The student clubs that were culturally based gave participants the opportunity to interact with other American Indian students who were similar to them. Of all the participants, eight had attended the annual North Carolina Native American Youth Organization conference at least once. It is held at various colleges throughout the state of North Carolina during the summer. Of those eight, Georgia and Marion had the opportunity to serve in statewide leadership roles. “[It was] just nice to have those opportunities in the school system”, Etta, referring to the Native American Student Association (NASA), the North Carolina Native American Youth Organization (NCNAYO), and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES), was able to join various organizations within her school that promoted not only academic achievement but her traditional culture as well.

Aside from simply providing an extracurricular activity for their resume, the extracurricular cultural activities provided Lumbee students, particularly those in a school with a small American Indian student population, the opportunity to spend time with others that they could relate to. To Cecil, one of the most valuable parts of taking part in the various clubs was the additional exposure and opportunity he got as a Lumbee student. The various college tours that Cecil went on opened his eyes to a world outside

of Hoke County. While providing opportunities for exposure to Cecil, the various American Indian student clubs and organizations provided opportunities for state and national leadership for Georgia and Marion. Georgia's greatest success within the educational system was realizing the leader that she could be, a realization that happened within the Native American Student Association at her school as well as at local American Indian student conferences. While Hoke County High School (the only high school in Hoke County) had a seemingly active Native American Student Association, involvement and participation in Robeson, Cumberland, and Scotland County, again, counties with multiple high schools, had varied amounts of involvement.

For some participants, local clubs were not provided at their school. Participants took distinct routes to fill this void. Marion, educated in Cumberland County schools, did not have a school American Indian student group. Instead of beginning one with the limited number of students within her school, Marion chose to become actively involved in the state organization, the North Carolina Native American Youth Organization. Bazie, also educated in Cumberland County, made no mention of an American Indian student group throughout her Kindergarten through twelfth educational career but was actively involved in American Indian student groups throughout her college career. Similarly, Purcell's school in Scotland County also did not have an American Indian student group and to fill this void, Purcell began one himself. The high level of engagement so many participants had in these American Indian youth groups, shows the critical importance of these extracurricular opportunities for Lumbee students to connect with others like them in meaningful spaces to share their culture. The story for students

in Robeson County, one of the largest counties in the state, varied. Spanning four different high schools, Etta in a school with a smaller population of American Indians was actively involved in various American Indian student clubs. Ander, on the other hand, recalls his involvement in the Native American Student Association waning as he entered high school. Louise, again, another student who attended a school in Robeson County that she considered tri-racial, was actively involved in the Native American Student Association. The story differs for Callie and Hubert who attended a school that currently has a student population that is 85% American Indian. Callie, distinctly recalling an American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES), cannot recall whether or not her high school had a Native American Student Association. Attending a school that was predominantly American Indian Callie stated, "I don't think NASA in general served a purpose." Encouraged to talk more about the purpose about the American Indian student clubs at other schools, Louise felt as if they served the purpose of "building that sense of community, you know, like we always do." A purpose she felt was relevant for those that did not attend schools with large populations of American Indian students. While participants were involved in American Indian clubs in various capacities throughout their educational career, most participants noticed their presence. For those that were involved, in the case of Marion and Purcell, it took a large amount of effort to either start their own club or travel to visit another. However, overwhelmingly it was clear that the American Indian student organizations provided a critical opportunity for American Indian students in schools with low populations of American Indian

students the chance to come together with those that were similar to them to socialize and celebrate their cultural identity.

### **Conclusion**

To Lumbee tribal young adults, the strengths of their Lumbee community have played a critical role in their success. The powerful connection between the previous literature presented in chapter two and the current Lumbee tribal strengths presented by the Lumbee young adults is evident. The Indigenous Knowledge Systems of the Lumbee people are alive and well. These knowledge systems are sustaining the Lumbee tribal young adults just as they have done for generations. Finding their roots in their language, their food, and their gatherings, the Indigenous Knowledge Systems of the Lumbee Tribe, as presented here by the participants, provides critical keys to working with Lumbee students within the classroom in a way that excites and engages them.

A key part of engaging Lumbee students, as presented by the narratives of Lumbee tribal adults, was the powerful role of relationships. Relationships engaged students both inside and outside of the classroom. Relationships are also a key part of culturally relevant teaching as presented by Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2010) in chapter two. Participants discussed the relationships that were fostered with American Indian and non-American Indian educators within the educational realm and the role that it played within their academic success. The literature presented in chapter two discussed the value of relationships created between non-American Indian educators and the tribal community. The narrative here adds an alternative perspective to this idea, showing the

critical importance of relationships fostered between non-American Indian and American Indian educators with Lumbee students.

The most important part of the story presented here is its unique perspective. The story here is tied to a specific place. While common themes may hold true for other American Indian tribal young adults, this story is place-based. This work does not seek to explore the universality of creating academic success for American Indian students across the nation but instead seeks to explore the narrative of the Lumbee tribe singularly. Thus, seeking to interrogate the ways of knowing and being for the Lumbee tribe in hopes of exploring ways to create an educational environment within the tribal community that better suits the academic success of Lumbee students (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). This place-based exploration fills a gap in the literature that often overgeneralized tribal nations and more often than not focuses solely on the Southwestern American Indian population.

While many of the cultural strengths here may not come as a shock to the non-American Indian reader, one may have caught some peculiar attention, religion. The close-knit ties of Christianity and the Lumbee population may shock a reader after the review of literature in chapter two clearly displayed the role that the church has played in the cultural genocide of the American Indian population. The role that the Christian missionaries played in various other tribal communities as presented by Deloria (1988) is quite bleak,

One of the major problems of the Indian people is the missionary. It has been said of missionaries that when they arrived they had only the Book and we had the land; now we have the Book and they have the Land. An old Indian once told

me that when the missionaries arrived they fell on their knees and prayed. Then they got up, fell on the Indians, and preyed (p. 101).

The practice of Christianity by the Lumbee people is one that has been recorded for centuries. While many tribal communities were plagued by missionaries, “the general lack of missionaries in Lumbee country is noteworthy, because it signifies that the people were already practicing a form of Christianity and were, in the eyes of the white man, ‘more civilized’ than most other Native Americans” (Dial, 1975, p. 106). Manteo was the first known American Indian to convert to Christianity in 1587 (Barton, 1967, p. 92). Manteo was not Lumbee but we see the beginnings of the spread of Christianity from this early point onward. According to Barton (1967), “From earliest colonial times, the Lumbee Indians have remained faithful to the faith which planted the feet of their forefathers upon these shores” (p. 93). The prominence of the Christian religion is long since been evidenced as presented by Dial (1975), “throughout their recorded history, the Lumbee Indians have practiced the white man’s religions. Just when Native American religion lost its influence is unknown” (p. 106). As a Lumbee and as a researcher, I found no way to explain to the non-American Indian reader the reasons behind the initial conversion to Christianity for the Lumbee people. Historical documents of those visiting the area spoke directly to the religious beliefs of the Lumbee people as being rooted in Christianity. In speaking at the 2017 Lumbee Nation Festival at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., a Lumbee tribal member, acknowledged this religious paradox, “you can be Indian and be Christian at the same time and that’s okay.” While we do not know what prompted our ancestors to take this religious route, one thing

is evident as presented in the stories here and by Dial (1975), “education and religion have been vital forces in the history of Lumbee Indians. Faith has sustained them in their struggle against adversity... Unquestionably, education and religion, combined with their determination and pride, have helped lift them ‘out of darkness’ (p. 117-118).

While the strengths of the Lumbee community extend far and wide, even to those in schools that have a smaller Lumbee student population, the barriers within the educational system touches Lumbee students in peculiar way. Participants portrayed the place they hold dear to their heart as a double-edged sword. Valuing their language and individuality as a people, their “home”, whether that be Cumberland, Scotland, Robeson or Hoke Counties, amassed a story of strengths as well as barriers that the participants have navigated within the educational system. While all students, Lumbee and non-Lumbee, face the lack of educational resources in lower socioeconomic locations, Lumbee students couple that with a lack of cultural representation within the school, a lack of identity recognition, and stereotypes that they work daily to combat. The story of these barriers will be presented in chapter five.

## CHAPTER V

### “IT WASN’T SUPPOSED TO BE ME”: OVERCOMING BARRIERS

While those in Robeson and surrounding counties will tell you that there is no other place like it, their determination is built as much on strengths as it is on the unique barriers that those in the Lumbee tribal community face. Lumbee tribal members, as previously discussed in chapter two, combat a myriad of issues related to institutionalized oppression such as lack of access to education, drugs, alcohol, and violence. A generational plague that has not left the most recent graduates untouched. My conversations with participants began by discussing the strengths within their educational system and their community, strengths and opportunities that allowed them to achieve inside and outside of the classroom. Identifying those strengths created a marred story of also realizing the limitations that they faced within their educational system in the four counties.

For many of the participants, the realization of the limitations of their educational careers did not come until they had spent some time outside of the kindergarten through twelve educational setting. Thus, through our conversations, reflection on situations and scenarios in which the truth behind part of their struggle garnered limitations such as the lack of rigor, opportunity, resources, funding, culture or simply a result of stereotypes held by those both inside and outside of the tribal community. All of which are barriers

faced by Lumbee tribal adults, and all barriers in which they were able to, in their own unique way, endure and overcome.

### **Looking from the Outside In: Missing Opportunities**

The educational setting in Robeson, Hoke, Scotland, and Cumberland County differed for each participant. For participants in Robeson County, one powerful theme rose to the top, missing opportunities. Many, having spent time outside of Robeson County often at institutions of higher learning were soon made acutely aware of the opportunities they were missing within their local educational system, an awareness that Callie stated was only apparent once she stepped into a collegiate classroom.

### **Lack of Educational Rigor**

“I didn’t know much compared to my peers.” Etta, coming to this realization after her first semester in college, shares the story of her high school education and the barriers she faced related to the lack of challenge and rigor. “I wanted the challenge,” Etta, referring to her academic career, sought out courses that she hoped would challenge her while in high school. However, these courses were hard to find. While some of her AP and Honors courses provided her with challenge, other courses throughout her career left her feeling “short-comed in a way.” The plethora of easy classes and a curriculum that did not encourage higher order thinking put Etta at a disadvantage as she matriculated into college. Though doing well on a placement test for a foreign language course at her college, Etta was not confident in her abilities and decided to enroll in a lower course, a pattern she followed throughout her post-secondary career. “It kinda made me think, not less of myself but like less of my abilities.” Math, biology, and chemistry courses proved

to be a challenge for Etta. Overcoming this barrier was not easy and is, in fact, a barrier that Etta still faces as she pursues a graduate degree. “If I had been more prepared in my study habits or just in my way of thinking and how to learn it would have been so much more beneficial when I got to the collegiate level,” a story that both Louise and Callie sympathized with.

For Etta, Callie, and Louise, experiencing post-secondary academics outside of Robeson County came as a shock. While their prior experience had been easy in spite of taking an advanced course load, their first year at college proved to be a bit of an adjustment. The adjustment to collegiate level academics, common for all incoming freshman, was unique for Etta, Callie, and Louise. Not only trying to digest collegiate level information, Louise discusses her struggle of also having to learn different forms of technology and learning management systems that many of her peers had been using in high school but were completely foreign to her. “It took me longer to become adjusted to certain technology... I’d have to actually learn how to do that, to form a routine, whereas other students just come in and say oh, I already did this.” Louise also posits that more preparation and career planning in high school would have also supported her as she found her future career, “if I had more preparation than trying to figure it out or taking longer to figure it out in college versus having preparation in high school to actually understanding well this is what’s offered, this is what you can do with this degree... it wouldn’t have taken me as long to figure that out.”

While Louise was overcoming a technological learning curve, Callie faced the realities of limited course availability within her high school,

I was going into classes and trying to keep up when teachers would skip the whole first sections, first four chapters of a book because they're like well you should have learned this in high school biology but I didn't because I didn't have that AP biology class or an upper level biology class, I had a basic one, you know, that's all we were offered and so it was really hard, really hard my first semester...I could not keep up because it was not an academic level that I was used to competing at - at the time.

The beginning of Callie's collegiate journey, as evidenced by the quote above, was "an adjustment to say the least." Callie's high school career was one in which she clearly knew she was not challenged. Having no study skills and admitting to never having to study in spite of taking advanced level courses, college came as a shock. "I had to teach myself things that other kids had already been taught but I had to learn. It was new for me." Seemingly, Callie, Etta, and Louise faced an invisible curriculum that they first had to master before succeeding within their collegiate careers.

Discussions about academics yielded a common response from participants in Hoke County, "it was kinda easy for me." Most participants found their educational career too easy, often lacking challenge. While Etta, Callie, and Louise were the most vocal about the lack of challenge within their educational curriculum, Shelby Jane, Ander, and Marion also recalled a less rigorous curriculum. Over 70% of all participants were enrolled in advanced classes such as Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) or college courses. The options were very limited, for some participants, when seeking challenging coursework. A trend was apparent in course offerings, with Cumberland County offering the IB course load and Hoke and Robeson Counties offering a limited amount of advanced level courses. Callie had long heard talk about the lack of educational rigor but did not fully understand until college,

I always heard people talking about [the lack of educational rigor] when I was down here but it was never something I understood until I could take a step back and look at my community from the outside in... Seeing what other people from like Mecklenburg County, and Wake County had at their schools... and their test scores and then you're kinda like yeah, I was not taught that.

Callie's interactions with peers outside of Robeson County made clear the stark difference in educational offerings, differences that hit close to home.

Etta, attending a school in Robeson County but not located in the tribal center, discussed the availability of courses at her school, "we were lucky that we did have the option to take APs because a lot of schools didn't have it." Schools in other parts of Robeson County as well as those in Hoke County offered limited advanced level courses. Callie was very vocal about the lack of exposure to advanced level courses, "we only had two AP courses that we could take in class so we didn't have any of that background and even then, they were not strenuous AP courses, to say the least." In Cumberland County, there seemed to be more options with Bazie enrolled in an IB program, a program unheard of in Robeson, Hoke, and Scotland County, and Marion (in Cumberland county) who took a plethora of college courses while still enrolled in high school. Shelby Jane, educated in Hoke County, also took college courses due to the limited AP courses. On the other hand, Purcell, well aware of the limited educational options at the local high school in Scotland County, enrolled in the early college program.

To Etta, Callie, and Louise, the concept of educational rigor tied directly to the offerings of advanced level classes. For Ben James, there was another type of educational offering that would have made his educational experience more beneficial, hands-on courses. Taking a variety of classes, some of his favorite being the automotive

electives, Ben James enjoyed the hands-on aspect of this course and wished it would have been incorporated into his other classes, “If [teachers] would have shown more hands-on...and more ways to do it.”

The lack of educational rigor within the curriculum, most noticeably the high school curriculum, induced a huge transition period for those that matriculated into institutions of higher learning. While some acclimated much quicker, some, such as Callie, Etta, Louise, and Ander, acknowledged their struggle. The lack of educational rigor was not the only noticeable thing missing for the participants. Various resources were clearly limited or not apparent throughout many of their educational careers.

### **Lack of Resources**

Etta, Louise, and Callie were confronted with the realities of limited course availability and a less than rigorous curriculum; the realities of missed opportunities often are coupled with a lack of resources. “I think in the system, in general, probably the greatest barrier is lack of access to resources...Kids don’t have the necessary supplies that they need in school,” supplies such as paper and pencils, as well as advanced technology, were clearly missing within the educational system according to Callie. To participants the term “resources” was applied to a broad plethora of things. While Callie saw a lack in school supplies and technology, Louise commented on the lack of financial resources, which, to her, would allow the school to offer more AP classes and college preparation classes. Attempting to find his journey post-high school, Ander was disappointed in the lack of information he received concerning post-secondary options. Finding himself at a 4-year university and soon finding out that it wasn’t for him, Ander

spent time in various fields before finding his calling, a journey he feels could have been avoided had he had more information concerning post-secondary options. “If I knew more about it, like if I knew, you know, what different programs there were out there that I could apply to, you know. I could have found out, well that’s something I like or don’t like, I could have gone from there.”

The lack of opportunities oftentimes went hand-in-hand with the lack of additional resources. Bringing forth the lack of technology in the classroom, Callie, Ander, and Louise also discussed the lack of materials students had as related to simple classroom necessities and textbooks. The lack of opportunity and resources goes farther than the simple materialistic items to most participants.

**Lack of personnel.** To overcome the barriers they faced within the educational system, some participants wanted more resources in the form of personnel. The limited amount of information received about college, post-secondary options, and preparation was often thought of as a result of lack of personnel to share the necessary information. Bazie and Ander, expressing their need for more exposure to post-secondary options, would have liked to see “representatives from different colleges come out to the schools” as well as past students who had attended various institutions of higher learning. Finding it challenging to navigate the college journey, Louise, Etta, and Shelby Jane thought additional personnel who provided that support and help would have been instrumental in their college application journey. Shelby Jane, unique in her story as a teen mom, also found the educational environment not as helpful in providing her resources as a young mother, “some type of resource person to talk to young girls that may get pregnant... if

somebody was out there to help them to say hey you can go to college.” While participants wanted additional resource personnel to support their personal struggles as well as their post-secondary journeys, one resource seemed to be in short supply for many participants - Indian Education.

The reach of personnel and what they could provide was also discussed in terms of the Indian Education program. Attending schools in Scotland and Cumberland Counties where the advanced level course offerings and educational rigor did not seem to be a barrier faced by Bazie, Marion, and Purcell, the lack of American Indian personnel was a barrier. While offering amazing opportunities where they could, Purcell, Bazie, and Marion, all attending schools with smaller American Indian populations, would have loved to have seen greater involvement of the local Indian Education programs. “I think Indian Ed needs to be bigger and their outreach needs to be bigger as well,” Purcell recalls limited interactions with the Indian Education personnel in Scotland County but recognizing their value and contribution, wanted to see the program expanded. Bazie had a similar concern in Cumberland County, “I wish Indian Education had played a bigger part for students in Cumberland County, I know it’s hard because the county is so big and there are so few of us, but I wish that that had started earlier.” Alternatively, during our focus group discussion, Etta, Louise, and Shelby Jane discussed the various opportunities they had encountered with the Indian Education program at their individual high schools whereas Callie, attending a school with a large population of American Indians discussed the limited number of students who were able to take advantage of the programs such as the annual North Carolina Native American Youth Organization conference. “Yeah, I

never got approached about NCNAYO, ever... You got picked. You had to know somebody.” A different perspective presented by Callie shows the struggles of a program when confronted with an abundance of participants.

Understanding the limited reach of limited personnel in a school system with American Indian students spread far and wide, the value of the opportunities provided by Indian Education was evident. While participants recognized the lack of educational resources available to them throughout their educational careers, another prominent barrier was the lack of American Indian identity within the classroom or even more powerful the incorrect representation of American Indian identity.

**“There’s No Such Thing as Native Americans, They were All Killed by Columbus”:  
American Indian Identity in the School**

The educational journey for each student is always vastly different. However, for American Indian students, finding themselves represented in the classroom and the curriculum is rare, often non-existent. This lack of representation, as commented on in chapter two, is apparent in the lack of American Indian faculty, the lack of culturally relevant texts, as well as the simple lack of accurate and current information provided as it relates to the American Indian population. The mention of American Indian culture within the classroom is rare, however, the mention of Southeastern tribal culture, specifically the Lumbee tribe is almost nonexistent, a phenomenon that has affected the identity development and representation of Lumbee Tribal young adults.

## **Lacking Representation of American Indian School Staff**

While the various opportunities and resources offered to American Indian students, such as the Native American Student Association (NASA) and the North Carolina Native American Youth Organization (NCNAYO), were praised by students, finding cultural representation within the classroom or school was unheard of in all towns but Pembroke. Callie and Hubert, both attending school in the town of Pembroke, can easily recall that a majority of their educators and administrators were Lumbee. This was not the case for the other ten participants. Attending schools in Robeson and Hoke County, which participants perceived as having a large amount of American Indian student representation, participants recall very few American Indian educators and administrators. “It may reflect the student population but to me it didn’t because I didn’t see them as much,” Louise was cognizant of the minimal American Indian staff representation at her school. For students outside of the tribal center of Pembroke, the number of American Indian staff they can recall was often as minimal as one or two over the course of their entire kindergarten through twelve experiences. For Bazie, attending school in Cumberland County, she could not recall any American Indian educators in her high school career, “all of them were white, except for my Spanish teacher.” Attending school in Hoke County, Shelby Jane relied heavily on the Lumbee educators for support. She said,

I felt if there was more Lumbee educators at our high school then that would help. Cause I feel like, we had one... it don’t matter if you were kinda the worst behaved, he still loved you anyways and he’d try to help you as much as he can. And maybe if we had more Lumbee or Native American educators out there then they could help.

While the comfort of a culturally familiar face is valuable, it is often not present within the classroom for Lumbee students. The limited representation of American Indian staff within the school was not the only disparity that participants noticed. With over 70% of participants enrolled in honors or advanced level courses, they often found themselves alone in the crowd.

### **Lumbee Representation in Advanced Level Courses**

Etta, Shelby Jane, Cecil, Purcell, Bazie, and Louise, all enrolled in honors or advanced placement classes, all quickly realized that in spite of having a substantial American Indian student population in their school, their advanced level courses were overwhelmingly non-American Indian. “It was definitely an interesting experience, off the top of my head, I think one other student who was Native and pretty much identified as Native... to be in that situation and be the one, the two in the class.” Etta reflects on her time in AP and Honors courses as one of two American Indian students. As a reader, this may not be shocking due to the low American Indian student population in most public-school districts across the nation. To put this issue into perspective, the students in Robeson and Hoke Counties attend schools that have an American Indian population that is considerably larger than other school districts. The amount of American Indian students in Robeson, Hoke, Scotland, and Cumberland Counties is linked to the geographical location they share with the tribal center.

Louise, attending another school in Robeson County, felt as if her experience as one of the only American Indian students in her advanced level course left her in a constant battle,

I might be one of two or three students, Lumbees, that were in those classes so then it kinda felt like a, not really a battle but you kinda felt like you had to stand your ground against the other races you know... and nobody in particular made you feel that way it's just kinda something innate that you kinda sense.

As our discussion on Lumbee representation within advanced level course and her experience continued, Louise had a few thoughts as to why the representation was low but could not definitively put her finger on the exact cause of the phenomena,

It was frustrating because I had other friends who I felt like should be in there and for one reason or another maybe they just didn't want to or maybe a teacher didn't recommend that they be in the class so maybe they were, they weren't as encouraged as other students ... teachers are gonna play a big part in what classes you know, you are recommended to, especially honors and AP. So those friends, you know, I could encourage them but maybe you know their teachers or parents didn't or would not.

While those attending school in Hoke and Robeson County faced advanced level courses with minimal amounts of other American Indian and Lumbee students, Lumbee participants in Cumberland County and Scotland County also dealt with a lack of American Indian representation in their schools as well as in their courses. Purcell, attending the Early College in Scotland County, an advanced college prep program, recalls that in a graduating class of thirty-seven students, only four were American Indian. The lack of American Indian representation left Purcell feeling lonely, "I really felt like I didn't have anybody kinda to relate to... you don't wanna feel like the minority of the minorities, you know and that's how I felt a majority of the time." While Purcell was one of the few Lumbees' in his early college program, Bazie was one of "three or

four minorities in those IB programs”. Marion, also in Cumberland County, had a relatable experience, “I was the only Native American student in the program and I was the only Native American student that graduated that year.”

Though in schools with a large population of American Indian students, participants found themselves in advanced level courses alone. Participants following the regular academic schedule did not report a lack of American Indian students in their classes; a factor that I find important to mention. While in classes as the sole representation of their culture, participants also found that their culture was often missing in the classroom curriculum as well.

### **American Indian Representation in the Curriculum**

Cultural representation was also missing from the curriculum, or, if it was present, was often incorrect. Purcell, speaking faster than normal, a clear sign of his frustration, recounts learning about the Trail of Tears in class. A common theme for many American Indian students, Purcell persists in asking his teacher about the other seven tribes in North Carolina to which he is given a blank stare and a insensitive response, “he was like I don’t know, you’ll have to talk to the administrators, these are the books we’re teaching out of.” He found his own answer in college. “I started majoring in American Indian and Indigenous Studies because it was everything I wasn’t taught in school. It’s sad because it’s part of our history.” Whether in a school with a large American Indian student population or a limited student population, information about past and present American Indian history and culture was missing from the classroom. Marion recalls reaching the American Indian portion in her history class,

When we got to the Native Americans, it wasn't a chapter. It was a paragraph on the side. We just had on the side-note here's the picture and oh yeah, here's a paragraph about the savage Indians...we didn't read that paragraph. It was there on the page and I said let me read this cause I was drawn to it, because it's me, it's about my people. And I was like "we're not gonna cover this?" and they was like, "no it's not important."

Some participants recall an influx of American Indian culture mentioned during the month of November, American Indian Heritage Month. "I feel like people really didn't care until it came to November...Native American heritage month is when people really wanna start talking about the Lumbees and stuff." Georgia quickly realized the ineffectiveness of attempting to implement an entire history into one day of programming, "you had Native American Month, African American Month but you can't smash all of that into one, one week or one day at an assembly. I just don't feel like they were, it weren't important enough to be discussed." Unfortunately, for Marion, even an assembly was too much to ask for. Marion took the initiative to ask administrators about putting on a program for American Indian Heritage Month, but she was confronted with a negative response, "it'd be like, no it's too much, there's not an interest."

For some students, the cultural knowledge they sought was found in alternative ways. Georgia, Cecil, and Shelby Jane found solace in an elective course in Hoke County, American Indian Studies. Though limited to one credit and one semester, it left a lasting impression. Though the course and educator provided students with insight into their history and their identity, some participants felt that the lack of cultural understanding of other educators was the gap that they were missing in the curriculum.

“Sometimes I felt misunderstood... Our culture wasn’t really accurately taught or it wasn’t accurately known to be taught,” Louise felt as if she was not the only one who did not accurately understand the Lumbee history and culture. Georgia, trying to find out her own Lumbee history was frustrated by the lack of cultural information she received, “I don’t feel like the teachers know much. I feel like teachers should know a little bit about other cultures other than what just the textbooks says and I don’t feel like they do.” Thus the cultural information students were seeking was not only missing from the curriculum but also was a missing link for their educators as well.

While there is a limited amount of cultural representation in the curriculum as it relates to American Indian culture and even less related to the Lumbee people, some participants had to not only battle the lack of information but also had to fight a constant battle of explaining their identity to those around them. Georgia faced this battle in the 8th grade; “some of the students had asked me questions about [being Lumbee] I couldn’t answer them.” Participants were expected to not only perform academically as students but were also in a constant war to develop their own identity in a world and in a curriculum, that was full of stereotypes and/or rendered them invisible.

### **American Indian Identity Development**

Identity development in adolescence is a tricky thing. Students are working their way through their academic careers while also meandering through the messy waters of determining who they are and who they want to be. This journey is supported and destroyed by various environmental factors that can work to either promote particular ways of being or can knowingly and unknowingly disenfranchise the identities of certain

students. Throughout my interviews with participants, discussions about the stereotypes they faced in the classroom were truly the hardest to work through. Not only because of the gruesome nature of some of their experiences but because, in some many instances, it was so relatable to my own story.

**“Someone’s always gonna be there to say what you are”: Facing stereotypes.**

Purcell, Marion, and Shelby Jane shared situations in which their culture and identity was often marred by the incorrect beliefs of others. While there are various stereotypes that are presented as related to the Lumbee people, one that Purcell, Louise, and Etta were forced to confront was the origin of the Lumbee people themselves. “They’ll pick and play with jokes, you’re mixed race,” calling into question the legitimacy of the Lumbee Tribe as American Indian people. Purcell faced these same accusations in Scotland County, “they had this mentality... that Lumbees are a mixed breed. You know, they’re mixed or whatever, they’re not real Indians.” The root of these words, fostered through false information, the lack of information, and harmful stereotypes, were also presented to Etta, “I had peers who were not Native American and would just be like ‘oh yeah, I heard Lumbees are fake.’” The accusations that participants were faced with are rooted in the winding history of the Lumbee people as presented in chapter two. These accusations are the reason that the Lumbee people have failed to receive federal recognition. As soon as participants declared their culture to non-American Indian peers, they were often met with a list of accusations, stereotypes, and historical misinformation that they had to immediately work to combat.

Purcell presented himself every day with a facade that was created to protect himself against the stereotypical view his classmates and educators had of Lumbee people. He said, “They had this mentality that Lumbees are very violent...very judgmental and very stereotypical views...It’s like you’re battling.” Purcell’s interactions with his peers was one in which he felt like he could not truly be himself. The embedded stereotypes held by fellow students were a burden that he carried daily, “Socially it was kinda, there was a barrier... emotionally it was hard too. I really had to stage who I was... I didn’t wanna act out or something because there was a stereotype that Lumbees were very aggressive people.” Working to combat the stereotypes and his identity, Purcell began the Native American Student Association at his school, “I felt like I was recognizing who I was as a Lumbee person... I can tell you everything now. I know my own history. I think that derived from me initiating these events and stuff in high school.” Purcell’s efforts to start the Native American Student Association were two-fold. While educating his fellow peers about his own culture, he found what was missing in the class and the curriculum, his culture.

Sadly, this battle also hit close to home for other participants. Shelby Jane felt as if the stereotypes of Lumbee students hindered her relationships with authority figures. Viewed as less intelligent than other students, the way in which Shelby Jane was treated as a Lumbee student left her not only frustrated and angry but also less willing to behave in school. “They’re gonna look at me like I’m a troublemaker anyways... so I went ahead and behaved like that.” Shelby Jane got pregnant her senior year of high school and was already combatting a myriad of stereotypes related to minority teen moms,

additionally, her identity as a Lumbee was also something she had to fight for. “There was other stereotypes that we experienced too while being in high school like oh, we weren’t smart because we were Lumbee.” In years to come, Shelby Jane heard that they also had their own name for the Lumbee students, “I heard that they called the Lumbee ‘dumbee’s’... I guess they feel like that cause we’re Lumbee we’re not as smart as other people.” Shelby Jane’s battle with racism and stereotypes was not one that she left in high school. Combatting those that looked down on her throughout her undergraduate degree, she found the same phenomena in her master's program as one of two Lumbee’s enrolled. Even in her Master’s program, Shelby Jane faced peers who “didn’t know Native Americans, didn’t know Lumbees’ existed.”

Marion’s story as a Lumbee student in a school with a small American Indian population is one in which she was openly confronted by the stereotypes held by not only her peers, but her teachers,

It was annoying because it’s like, I’m Native American, I’m being told I’m Native American at home but then I would go to school and people’d be like oh you’re just a light skin black girl and I’m just like no I’m not black. They’d be like no, there’s no such thing as Native American, they were all killed by Columbus.

This was a harsh reality for a young student to navigate. While in middle school, Marion faced bullies who constantly picked on her due to her extreme eczema and her identity as an American Indian, a time that pushed her into depression and led her to thoughts of suicide. Seeking help, both she and her mother reached out to the principal to try to rectify the situations only to find that they were constantly shut down and not heard. Eventually transferring to a different school, Marion recalls her first day, “I was like the

darkest thing there and I was just like white people, white walls, white paper... It was just weird... you walk in a classroom and they're like what are you." The discrimination that Marion faced came from more than just students,

Students, teachers, even parents would even say you're not Native American, there's no such thing as Native Americans, you were all wiped out. I even got called one time by a parent, I was just being a sensitive cry-baby Indian and I needed to get my feathers out of my hair and unbraided my hair and face reality.

The stereotypes and lack of cultural understanding that Marion encountered was the root of her greatest barrier. Her involvement in a mentoring program throughout her senior year left her constantly dealing with a guidance counselor who was negative and verbally discouraged Marion multiple times, "it was just everyday a constant battle... she would go out of her way to put you down." In spite of keeping up with all of her work when missing school for cultural activities such as conferences or powwows, her guidance counselor oftentimes challenged her absences even after they had received principal approval. Her mother, sitting in on our interview sessions chimed in, "it was like she had a problem with her being involved in so many Native American things."

Living and going to school in Cumberland County also posed a unique set of challenges for Marion. Connecting deeply to her roots in Robeson County, unlike Bazie, at times Marion had to fight for her own identity while being questioned by other Lumbees. "I would try really really hard to connect to the ones who were in Robeson County and Pembroke because they were called the real Indians and I was called a city Indian." Once, while checking her race on a school document, Marion realized that the check next to "American Indian" had been removed. "My Indian teacher erased my

check mark from where I put American Indian/ Alaskan Native and put Black.” It was this instance that hurt Marion more than any of the others she had faced. Her mother, sitting in on our interview because she had driven Marion there chimed in, “you are demanding for your identity but you also have to do it amongst your own people sometimes”, to which Marion replied, “and that’s what hurts more actually.”

Not all participants spoke openly about the stereotypes they faced while in the classroom and there is a strong possibility that their experience with race, identity, and stereotypes were truly not as relevant in their minds. For Marion, Shelby Jane, and Purcell, the situations they faced were intricately tied to their identity and the development of that identity as Lumbee students. It is worth noting that Marion, Shelby Jane, and Purcell were all educated in Hoke, Cumberland, or Scotland Counties, all counties with lower populations of Lumbee students in comparison to Robeson County. While not all participants may have faced or shared instances of facing stereotypes, many of them did speak to the development of their identity as Lumbee students.

**“When you meet other people, how do you explain yourself?”: Lumbee identity development.** The lack of cultural knowledge that educators and non-American Indian students had often only reinforced the stereotypes surrounding Lumbee culture and left many participants fighting to prove their identity, often times, an identity that they were still developing. For Louise, one of the barriers she faced was simply a solid understanding of who she was as a Lumbee. Questioning her own understanding of who she was, Louise was then faced with the issue of explaining her identity and culture to others; “when you meet other people how do you explain yourself and then how do

others who are the same as you, how do they explain themselves?” Louise felt there was a lack of understanding and explanation of Lumbee history and culture within the classroom, an issue that left her struggling to know what to believe about her people.

Georgia, attending American Indian assemblies at her school quickly realized how little she knew about her culture and who she was; “I felt embarrassed because it’s like dang you don’t really know much about your people.” This embarrassment pushed Georgia to explore her culture through the American Indian Studies elective course at her high school while also seeking out other cultural resources in her community such as tribal elders and Lumbee tribal culture classes. While the pressure to understand and explain her identity to others was a catalyzing force for Georgia, Bazie, attending a school with a limited amount of American Indian peers had moments of doubt with her own identity. Bazie said,

I probably did have some moments where I was like just trying to figure out who I was and where I fit in . . . I was just trying to figure out who I wanted to be because growing up as, I mean there were a few Native American students but we were never grouped in that way so I think I just kinda of tried to fit in where I thought was best.

Trying to navigate an educational environment, as a Lumbee student, Bazie did what she thought was best, she tried to fit in. Though not discussing any clear challenges she faced with her identity while in school, Bazie did have one wish, “I wish Indian Education had played a bigger part for students in Cumberland County... I just think like knowing who you are and knowing more about it is helpful.”

The story of identity development for Lumbee students, like so many other things in this work, differed across county lines. The stories presented above from Marion, Bazie, and Purcell were stories of students who attended schools with a limited amount of American Indian students. Alternatively, participants attending schools with a larger American Indian population did not recall thinking much about their identity as Lumbee students. “I didn’t really think about it too much, you know. I had other Native American students around me. Whereas if I probably went to another school, and I were the only one, I’d probably, you know, feel some type of way or stick out or be different,” Ander’s comment was closely tied to Callie’s, “that’s never a question I had to ask myself, it was never something my attention was brought to because I wasn’t different.” The comfort of other Lumbee students and the support that they played as students learned and grew within their own identity was evident. Shelby Jane, attending school in Hoke County where the American Indian population was less than Robeson County but still substantial, stated “I felt like having friends that were Native American kinda helped other than just being alone by myself.” Purcell, entering school as one of the few Lumbee students felt the social and emotional pressure of that weight, “I felt like I didn’t have anybody to kinda relate to.”

While Callie was surrounded by Lumbee tribal students throughout her educational experience, during the focus group with Etta, Louise, and Shelby Jane, she brought to light some of the things that she felt were taken for granted due to the large Lumbee student body population.

Because we were a Native school, we never taught anything about Native's... we never learned anything. We never had a culture class. I never learned background and the history and never been taught these things when we were coming through. It was just like oh you know, you're Native so we don't need to teach you that. It is the culture, and what you grow up around, and what you know, but there's still history to it that we need to learn.

To those in the focus group, this was surprising news. The assumption had been that because of the large American Indian population that the culture and identity had been infused within the school. To Callie, this was not the case.

Across Hoke, Scotland, Cumberland, and Robeson County, the journey that students took as they navigated their identity as Lumbee students was intriguing. Some found solace in other American Indian students, some fit in wherever they could, some sought outside resources and some, though being surrounded by their tribal members, felt as if they had a superficial understanding, all had a journey that they were forced to navigate due to a system and a curriculum that did not acknowledge, discuss, or celebrate who they were.

The lack of information that many students received pushed them to not only find their own answers but also to educate their own non-American Indian peers, a cause that many of them picked up willingly. "I feel like it's my job to educate others", Purcell along with many other participants worked diligently to share their culture with others. Bazie declares that her greatest involvement in Lumbee tribal culture is the act of educating others, in her own words, "being a voice in a space that doesn't have that at all." Sharing their truth and their culture with those around them was a duty that participants carried long after their primary days.

The barriers that participants faced were multifaceted. The lack of opportunities due to the lack of resources, expounded by a cultural identity that was invisible within the classroom, would seemingly leave participants in a conundrum where learning and success would be, at best, difficult, at worst, impossible. It is in the thicket of this condition that the Lumbee participants wrangled the strengths of Lumbee culture in ways that allowed them to overcome and succeed in ways that many would not think possible.

### **Crossing County Lines: Cumberland County Barriers**

As presented in chapter four, Bazie and Marion, both from Cumberland County, often shared stories that both coincided with Hoke, Scotland, and Robeson County participants but also gave a unique perspective that I feel is worth mentioning. Educated in a system that has a much lower American Indian student population, Bazie and Marion made no mention of educational rigor or the lack of resources. While they did both deal with issues of identity development and the lack of Lumbee culture within the curriculum, they had a distinct way of viewing themselves in relation to their peers.

Reflecting on the barriers she faced, Bazie states,

I just feel so privileged because I can't really think of anything that stands in my mind like this was a barrier for me... the more I think about it, the more it seems like everything was kind of there for me, like I had the materials I needed, I felt like I had enough guidance... I had a good academic program in high school.

Her educational experience was one that afforded her many opportunities in the Cumberland County school system. However, a barrier that she identified, unlike participants in Hoke, Scotland, and Robeson Counties was one that appeared as a reflection of what her peers had in their home life that she was missing,

I think other students are privileged in a way of like having multiple generations of experience so like my grandma couldn't help me with certain things... so like multiple levels of privilege in a sense. I was blessed to have a mom who knew the things that she did but to some extent now even her scope is limited.

As one of the very few Lumbee students in her school, Bazie attended a diverse school and came into contact with a diverse student population. However, the educational limitations that have longed plagued Lumbee people are present across county lines. While students in Robeson, Hoke, and Scotland County may have had parents who had a limited amount of educational experience, they were surrounded by other students who were experiencing the same generational disconnect, in Cumberland County, and for Bazie, this disconnect was vivid. "You don't know what you don't know," though supporting her daughter throughout her educational career, her mother's limited perspective only allowed her to give so much information. "Like my mom didn't really talk to me much about the college experience... maybe if my family had had some of those experiences maybe they could have told me more and then by the time you got to applying for grad school they didn't know anything so once I got here I kinda really was on my own." Bazie's barrier was present because of her distinct peer population. This was also the case with Marion.

Marion's social interactions made it evident that "normals for you aren't the same norms for everybody else." Again, present in a school with a very small American Indian population, Marion found that her way of living was often very different from her peers,

You don't have like the same normals... so like normal for like some of my friends they would have like a phone, a tablet, a laptop and they had like wifi and all that but for me, like I had a phone and I was lucky to have a phone. So it was

just like trying not to let that bother you and like saying okay, even though they had that, I'm still gon' make it even though I just have this.

Linking to Bazie's narrative, a sense of comparison amongst peers presented historical characteristics of Lumbee tribal culture (the lack of education and lower socioeconomic status) that often go unmentioned in Hoke, Scotland, and Robeson Counties because they are a common characteristic. While students in the other counties mentioned a lack of resources within the classroom, the lack of technology at home was never mentioned. However, in Cumberland County, these characteristics are magnified in an area with a lower Lumbee student population. The ability to draw connections with someone like you, someone with a similar background, culture and lifestyle was difficult.

### **“It Wasn't Supposed to be Me;” Beating the Odds**

“I was accepted into Carolina.”

“I started an advice column.”

“I was the valedictorian of my high school.”

“I was the first in my family to go to college.”

“I graduated high school.”

“I was the first American Indian Salutatorian at the Early College.”

“I graduated while 5 months pregnant.”

“I realized the leader that I could be.”

“I successfully passed my class and was able to enroll in college classes.”

“I was a Gates Millennium Scholar.”

“I graduated from high school with twelve years of perfect attendance.”

“I joined the Native American Student Association.”

“I gained lifetime friends.”

“I started the Native American Student Association at my school.”

“I balanced my academics as well as extracurricular activities.”

Participants shared their successes within the educational system with passionate smiles and heartwarming stories that oozed of perseverance and dedication. This section

begins by listing many of those successes. Not tied to any particular participant, the list of the successes above defies what is often written in literature about American Indian students. Plagued with stories about deadly statistics and failure, the opportunity to hear their stories of their strengths and successes was a powerful moment in this work. For many of the participants, they were well aware of the odds that stood against them. So many factors in their lives told them that many of the successes above would never be possible, and yet, they beat the odds.

The realities of the barriers that the participants faced are the realities of many Lumbee students in Hoke, Scotland, Robeson, and Cumberland Counties. Their barriers did not end with missing opportunities, the lack of resources, or the lack of American Indian representation within the curriculum. Their stories, their barriers, the beauty of their individuality, show so much more that they had to overcome. Hubert, dealing with a father who was on drugs and Etta, losing her mother and never having known her father, still overcame. Marion, trying to constantly find steady internet access and Ander and Ben James fighting a gnawing internal battle to do better than those in their family who didn't graduate, still overcame. Bazie, attempting to fill the gaps of generational knowledge between her and her grandmother, and Georgia, facing her lack of post-secondary preparation, still overcame. Shelby Jane, 5 months pregnant, and Louise, trying to figure out who she was as a Lumbee woman, still overcame. Achieving academic success within the classroom while dealing with internal and external barriers such as these is hard to say the least. This study showed one thing to be true, a nation of people who have fought for generations to survive, continue to fight to do so. Now the

war takes a different form. These examples are stories of Lumbee young adults who show what is achievable, what can be done in spite of the odds. This study presents stories of Lumbee students who stood on the foundation of their culture and allowed it to help them climb the ladder to success. Statistically, my participants beat the odds.

While the bitterness of the barriers can be overwhelming, the sweetness of their successes was truly inspiring. Bazie, one of four minorities in the IB program at her school, graduated as the first Native American Valedictorian at her high school.

I think I beat the odds in a sense. Like a single mom, minority student, Native American at that, didn't have any like special stuff going on other than what I earned, I mean I went to a public school...it wasn't supposed to be me.

But it was. For many of the participants, they found themselves succeeding even when they knew the odds were against them.

Not only overcoming the widespread barriers listed above, the participants, eight of which came from divorced or single parent homes, faced insurmountable other barriers, including familial drug and alcohol abuse, brain tumors, family death, family pressure, hectic schedules, the lack of steady internet connection, and unreliable transportation. To say that their stories are remarkable is an understatement. As a listener of these intricate stories, my favorite turn in the story often came when I asked how they overcome. How did they make it, in spite of all the odds? How does one overcome stereotypes, confusing cultural identity, lack of resources, and opportunity? How does one overcome?

Finding its root back in the strengths of the Lumbee community, participants attributed their success to the support they received from family and community members as well as the instilled resilience and perseverance of the Lumbee people. “We’ve been overcoming, so it’s just instilled. Like years after years after years, you’re just like, I gotta do what I gotta do.” The ingrained cultural power of the Lumbee people empowered the participants, all in unique ways. Callie, struggling with the curriculum at her new college put in the hard work to overcome; “it took a lot of hard work. I had to teach myself things that other kids had already been taught but I had to learn.” The support that participants received in various aspects were all attributed to key relationships in and outside of the educational setting, relationships that have fostered the success of the Lumbee tribe for generations and again, showing a testament to the power of relationships for the Lumbee community. Georgia, ashamed and frustrated by her lack of cultural knowledge sought out those in her community that would mentor her and provide support, and she learned more about her Lumbee history and culture. She explained, “we had people that worked with us who wanted to teach us.” All were seeking to overcome, seeking to succeed, seeking to become better than the realities of their present stories. The participants’ stories of success beat the odds.

### **Conclusion**

The stories presented by the participants and the barriers they faced are often the stories that many American Indian students face according to literature. As presented in chapter two, references to American Indian culture in schools often does so in a pre-1900’s context (Landry, 2014; Wade, 2014). This historic representation can be found at

the root of the stereotypes perceived by those that told Marion “all Indians are dead” (Landry, 2014), their historical and cultural knowledge of American Indians limited to the small historical paragraph in a textbook. Researchers have shown that the integration of American Indian culture within the classroom can lead to “healthy identity formation” (Castagno & Brayboy, 2009, p. 958). Participants clearly saw their culture lacking within the classroom and for many of them, their identity development took its own rocky path.

The most telling connection of these stories are the ways in which, in so many instances, the pedagogies and practices within their classrooms ran adversely to ways in which researchers have expressed are the best ways to academically support and engage American Indian students. Still relegating American Indian culture to one cultural day or presentation that superficially celebrates culture finds that American Indian culture has not found its permanent place in many classrooms. Castagno & Brayboy (2008) call for a critical eye from educators to question whether or not American Indian culture is represented in today’s classroom (p. 948). The harm done to the identity development and personal understanding of many participants came from both altercations with non-American Indians who questioned their identity as well as the constant search for themselves in a space where they spent so much time, the classroom. Those that did endure altercations with non-American Indians did so because of the lack of knowledge shared with non-American Indians throughout their own educational experiences. These people are products of an education system that makes contemporary American Indian life, and in this context, Lumbee life, invisible.

Another aspect of the literature that is missing in the stories of participants is a clear understanding of tribal culture when it comes to educators. While the culture of the Lumbee tribe did not find its place within the classroom or curriculum, many participants felt misunderstood by educators and often felt as if their educators had no knowledge of their tribal culture and Indigenous Knowledge Systems. The call from research is clear; educators must have an understanding of their students and the local tribal community (Powers et al, 2003, p. 19; Yurkovich, 2001, p. 266; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007, p. 87). Partnerships with the community, tribe, and school can work to bridge this lack of knowledge and integrate the cultural norms of the surrounding community into the classroom.

The stories of the participants make it clear what is missing within their classrooms. However, the most inspiring part of this work is still their ability to succeed. But still, my work does not let me forget, Cecil. Cecil, as you recall, was incarcerated soon after completing his first interview. The stories presented by the participants will be culminated in chapter six where I seek to share where go from here. Building on their stories of overcoming, chapter six seeks to mold recommendations for educators, administrators, parents, and tribal members, recommendations that will allow us to support all of our Lumbee students.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE VISION

Lumbee students in today's educational system face a distinct set of challenges. Lumbee students face issues of funding, resources, and opportunity while also navigating an invisible identity within the classroom setting. The barriers that Lumbee students face within the classroom are then combatted with a cultural strength that has itself withstood generations of genocide and acculturation. Lumbee students and educators within the Lumbee community have found their own ways to combat the issues they face. Whether seeking outside opportunities to learn about their cultural identity or building critical relationships with Lumbee educators within school walls, their drive to succeed is incomparable.

#### **What Did I Seek to Learn?**

My own experiences as a Lumbee tribal student left me longing for an understanding of who I was and where my place was in the classroom. As I advanced in my educational career, the statistics continued to leave me breathless as it relates to American Indian youth in the United States. This is what brought me to this work, a desire to learn about the educational experiences of other Lumbee tribal young adults in hopes of finding ways to eradicate the oppression that has plagued our people for so long. Uniquely, I sought to do this by returning to the roots of who we are as tribal people,

storytellers. Through the stories of Lumbee tribal young adults ages 18-26, I wanted to address the following questions:

- What are the educational experiences of Lumbee young adults ages 18-26?
- What educational barriers do Lumbee young adults face?
- What strategies have Lumbee young adults used to overcome educational barriers?
- What educational successes have Lumbee young adults celebrated?
- What helped facilitate those successes?

This study was an exploration into the narrative stories and lived realities of Lumbee Tribal young adults in Hoke, Scotland, Robeson, and Cumberland Counties, counties that were chosen because of their distinct geographic location in relation to the tribal center in Pembroke, North Carolina. I sought to learn about the Lumbee educational experience from Lumbee students in a way that was valued in traditional Lumbee culture. The lessons that were birthed out of this study provide insight into the educational stories of Lumbee students and more importantly, a direction to support the future generation.

### **Lessons Learned**

As a Lumbee, I consider myself well versed in my culture. I have spent countless hours studying the history of my people and learning customs and traditions that have kept my people alive for generations. Yet hearing these stories from the mouths of my participants was as if I was hearing this information for the first time. Throughout my

conversations, I found myself lost in tales of tragedy and triumph. Enthralled by passionate stories of racism, stereotypes, and overcoming. Enchanted by the stories that I was seeking so badly to tell, chapters four and five present a narrative account of the barriers and successes of Lumbee students.

### **The Strength within the Lumbee Tribe**

Throughout this work, we see that who the participants were as Lumbee tribal members played a large part in how they overcame various barriers and also facilitated their successes. The connection to home helped participants maintain their identity as Lumbee tribal members, an identity they were proud of. Celebration around food, Lumbee Homecoming, language, and local powwows were all distinct cultural groundings that participants took part in as Lumbee tribal members. Recounting their time within the educational system, one aspect rose to the top as a valuable strategy for success -- genuine, loving relationships. Many of these relationships were with fellow Lumbee tribal members who worked to support them throughout their educational careers while some of them also found critical relationships with non-American Indian educators who showed a genuine concern for the Lumbee participants inside and outside of the classroom. Not only did the participants find strength in the relationships that they built with American Indian and non-American Indian educators, participants also spoke definitively about the power of coming together with their American Indian and Lumbee peers to celebrate their cultural identity. Whether defined as the Native American Student Association (NASA) or the North Carolina Native American Youth Organization

(NCNAYO), participants valued the opportunity to come together to support American Indian youth like themselves.

Using their identity as Lumbee tribal members and the strengths within their communities to face various barriers, participants shared a beautiful collage of their educational successes. Graduating from high school with top honors, attending their top choice universities, finding their strengths as leaders, their successes, different for each participant, were a powerful testament to their perseverance.

Alternatively, the participants faced barriers within the educational system that were unlike those faced by their non-American Indian peers. While the cultural strengths of the Lumbee tribe played a role in abating some of the barriers, to the participants the barriers were present and forceful in various arenas of the educational journey.

### **Overcoming Educational Barriers**

Attending schools in Robeson, Scotland, Hoke, and Cumberland counties, the experiences of the 12 participants spanned the spectrum of barriers. Participants in Hoke and Robeson County spoke frequently of a lack of educational rigor as well as a lack of opportunities related to their educational attainment. With limited material resources, such as technology, to support their educational journey as well as the lack of advanced level courses within the classroom, participants often went into post-secondary education unprepared and lacking confidence in their ability to succeed. Whether referring to financial resources or personnel resources, participants were well aware of the things that their school was lacking.

The “lack of” theme also spanned the realm of the representation of American Indian identity within the classroom for all participants. Throughout the curriculum as well as within the staff and faculty at their schools, Lumbee participants found it hard to find representations of who they were. In some instances, finding examples of who they were perceived to be painted a pre-1900’s context that completely ignored the modern culture of American Indian people. Muddying the waters of identity development for many participants, they were also navigating stereotypes imposed by ignorant peers and educators who had no knowledge of American Indian culture, specifically Lumbee culture. It is this lack of knowledge and representation of Lumbee tribal culture that makes this study an influential add to the world of academia.

The most beautiful lesson learned throughout this work was the ways in which the Lumbee students are living their own Red Pedagogy. Presented in chapter two, Red Pedagogy “recognizes the organization of nation, tribe, and family, in their uniqueness. It is also the fire that warms us, sheds light upon us, and initiates intention, guiding the concepts of global Indigenous community solidarity” (Windchief, Garcia and San Pedro, 2015, p. 281). Finding strength in their community, building supportive bonds through familial relationships, seeking out the resources they needed to succeed, their practices in Red Pedagogy were the ways in which they were surviving the mainstream educational system as Indigenous students. Whether through their shared stories or their actions, as a researcher I find representations of decolonization within so many stories that they shared.

Building their own Red Pedagogy, the involvement of every single student in cultural activities inside and outside of the educational arena is a token example of McCarty and Lee's (2014) culturally revitalizing pedagogy. Culturally revitalizing pedagogy, as presented in chapter two, seeks to "reclaim and revitalization what has been disrupted and displaced by colonization" (McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 103). In their own unique ways, students shared how they lived their Lumbee tribal culture, many of them taking part in extracurricular cultural student organizations and others finding opportunities to share their culture whenever possible. For the Lumbee, the work of cultural revitalization is critically important. As a southeastern tribe that faced the onslaught of genocide first, the cultural identity and history of the Lumbee tribe is difficult to trace after years of assimilation. This truth is found in the difficulty to obtain federal recognition. While Paris and Alim (2014) share the value of a culturally sustaining pedagogy, McCarty and Lee's (2014) extension of that work is of pivotal importance for the Lumbee people. The importance of this revitalization, oftentimes not supported within the educational system, was recognized by the participants. While many of them were actively involved in various activities that worked to sustain and revitalize their culture, even those that had lower levels of involvement acknowledged it. Ben James and Ander, both working full time jobs and both previously involved in culturally extracurricular groups, had the exact same response, "I'm not as involved as I should be."

Participants may have referenced their involvement as a calling to learn more or to spend more time with peers that they could relate to; unknowingly they were filling the

gap that the educational system had created. The lack of culture within their educational career is one barrier that they all sought to fill in their own way, creating a Culturally Revitalizing and Red Pedagogy that worked for them as they pursued their education.

### **Significance of the Study**

As I worked to complete the literature review for this study, the significance became more and more clear. While I passionately valued the work of American Indian and Alaskan Native scholars and sought their research as critical for my review of the literature, one thing remained true, my people were still invisible. The southeastern American Indian population is often not present within the literature related to American Indians, even harder to find are the realities and stories of American Indian tribes that are not federally recognized such as the Lumbee.

In spite of our significant size and history, our story has not found it's way into academia. In spite of our size, our students are still feeling the sting of colonization and assimilation. This study opens the door to a discussion on what we need to do to break down the colonization that students face in Hoke, Scotland, Robeson, and Cumberland Counties. Hopefully the results of this study can be used to directly alter the trajectory of strategic planning for the next Lumbee generation.

### **Areas of Growth & Implications for Future Research**

Though limited in the world of academia, the intent of this study and this work was never wide enough to cover the breadth and depth of the entire Lumbee student experience. Throughout my study (from proposal to recruitment to interviews to writing) I have kept an intent eye on "holes" that need to be filled within my work. These distinct

places represent areas where future research has a place to take root and grow. Typically referred to as limitations, these areas of growth, presented with humility, allow the reader to understand my research in the context of the challenges I faced. These areas of growth also allow a critical space for Lumbee researchers within the world of academia to continue to share the voice of the Lumbee people.

### **Historical Trauma and Oppression**

Brayboy's (2005) work on TribalCrit presents nine tenants, three of which I think are worth mentioning again,

- 1. Colonization is endemic to society.
- 2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain...
- 6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.

Chapter one of this work brought to light some of the devastating statistics that are the consequences of the aforementioned oppressions. As this work progressed and as I listened to the stories presented by the participants, the truth behind their barriers and the struggle towards their successes is vested in Brayboy's (2005) TribalCrit tenants. The markings of colonization, imperialism, White supremacy, and assimilation could be found scratched deep within their stories of invisibility, stereotypes, and racism. At no point in time do I want the reader to forget that the educational system that these students are in is one that has long been harmful and oppressive for American Indian people.

Chapter two of this study paints the story of educational oppression that American Indians faced with boarding schools and segregation, I see this work as an extension of that educational oppression.

As a researcher and as a Lumbee, I feel as if there are steps that must be taken to eradicate the injustices within the educational system. This work was but a step. This work presents the realities of today's educational system as shared by Lumbee tribal young adults across four counties. Their experiences bring to light the hostility that they often face in their learning environment. While this work does not extend to evaluating the entire educational system as a colonizing force that needs to be decolonized, I hope that the implications latter mentioned begin this decolonization within the classroom. Better yet, I hope that this work begins the process of decolonization within the hearts and minds of educators and administrators. The decolonization of the mind is a precursor to addressing the system in its entirety.

Additionally, the historical trauma that rears its head in the statistics that show the effects of genocide, assimilation, and colonization also cannot go without notice. Throughout our conversations, the lives of the participants were painted in their full truth. Coming from single parent homes, homes dealing with drug abuse, raised by grandparents and aunts, and homes with parents that had a limited amount of education and financial resources, to many Lumbee students, these are common situations. As a researcher, I think the very nature of the questions and the verbiage used pushed the participants to focus on successes and barriers within the classroom. The lives they lived outside of the classroom were not exempt from these discussions but they often were not

expanded upon. Only one participant, Hubert, viewed situations in their home life as a barrier to their academic success. To the other participants facing less than perfect home situations, I presume that they did not perceive these barriers as having an impact within their educational career. In all honesty, reviewing the tone and flow of the conversation, the students' at-home situations that one would perceive to be barriers did not come across as barriers at all. Instead, they were presented as simply another fact of life.

This understanding gives future researchers a powerful niche to begin reviewing the connection between Lumbee participants' home lives and their academic performance. While some of the stories here show powerful vignettes of perseverance and determination in spite of all the statistical truths that Lumbee students face, the generational plague of historical trauma must still be addressed. It is in this future work that I find the answer for students like Cecil. If students are working to pull their way out of the educational, health, and financial disparities that have plagued their families, what supports do they need within the school? What partnerships do schools need to make with external resources and service organizations to help students overcome at-home barriers that have plagued their families for generations? How do we begin to identify and support students like Cecil to prevent losing them to system? The questions posed here fall outside the parameters of this particular study but must be answered if we plan to move forward in our work to sustain and revitalize our culture for Lumbee tribal students.

### **“Look at the Population that You are Interviewing”: Participant Recruitment**

As the largest tribe east of the Mississippi River, identifying eligible participants for my study was easy. As presented in chapter three, the process for reaching out, sharing information, and getting feedback was quite simple. However, the limitations of the pool from which I would be interviewing soon became clear. One hundred percent of my participants had received a high school diploma. A statistic that left me questioning, what would those that didn't make it through high school say? Ninety-two percent of them experienced post-secondary education in some form, with Ben James being the only exception. Thirty-three percent of the participants had obtained or were working towards a graduate degree. The limitations of this study in terms of educational attainment diversity are clear. The participants I spoke to had interacted with an advanced collegiate curriculum and were able to discuss the ways in which they felt as if they were or were not prepared for the academic world post-graduation, a reality that was presented by Callie during our focus group, “And I also think too you have to look at the population that you are interviewing. I can say personally that there were kids that I graduated with that did not overcome their barriers, you know.” The narrative of those who didn't graduate high school and/or didn't attend college is missing. While the topic of college readiness was explored in depth through this work, the topic of career readiness was only slightly touched upon. I do not want this work to imply that the necessary suggestions, recommendations, and implications for future practice and research would imply that each Lumbee student should be on a determined academic path towards college. This is

not the reality. However, what this does imply is that there is a clear area for continued research related to the academic success of Lumbee students within the classroom.

Future research should focus heavily on diversifying the education attainment of all participants to ensure that representatives from all levels are present, particularly those that were deemed as “not academically successful” as assumed by the lack of graduation. I describe this issue in this manner for one primary reason; the lack of a diploma should not be equated to a lack of academic success in the Lumbee community. Life stories have taught me this reality. I have various family members that have been forced to quit school to take care of children, grandparents, and parents. This is a reality that does not say that they were not academically successful but instead efforts to simply survive prohibited them from obtaining a traditional education. I also find it critically important to mention that some chose to forgo college or post-secondary education in exchange for either a career or military service. This Lumbee population was also largely excluded from my study.

Another aspect of this research that should be given in-depth consideration in the future is the extremism that can be found amongst the counties and schools. As I dove deeper and deeper into my data and interviews, the stark differences represented in across counties and schools arose as a theme, as evidenced in Chapter four and Chapter five. Future research should seek to include an equal number of participants from various like if you talked to my seniors right now they would be a better, like what they're going through right now, I know they deal with barriers every day and I can't remember

counties in order to draw cross-county comparisons. More representation from those areas, more stories, would have made those comparisons even more powerful.

The last limitation, presented by Etta, was the simple length of time that participants had been removed from the K-12 educational world,

I feel every single step that I had that was a barrier so I know right now if you talked to them they would um, they would be able to tell you like, “oh you know....”

Lumbee students currently enrolled within the educational system would have the current knowledge to not only expand upon the barriers and successes they were faced with but would likely have the memory to share detailed examples.

As a doctoral student, this was a point of contention for me when deciding upon the age range of participants. I was well aware that the students currently enrolled in the kindergarten through twelfth grade system would be able to provide the most up-to date and relevant information, however, the process of obtaining consent, securing an interview location, and conducting two interviews with a minor was quite daunting. In hindsight, I support my decision to interview participants aged 18 through 26, in part because they have the lens of hindsight and could speak to how prepared, or not prepared, they felt for life after high school. However, for future research, this work with middle and high school students would be powerfully telling. Not having exposure to a post-secondary curriculum, what are their thoughts on educational rigor? Opportunities? Resources?

## **The Future of Teacher Education**

An apparent theme throughout this work was the value of relationships that students fostered with American Indian as well as non-American Indian educators. For many students, such as Ander, these relationships were critical for the post-secondary educational steps and for some students, such as Marion; these relationships ruined their self-confidence. These findings showed that the relationship development between students and educators was often initiated, orchestrated, and maintained by educators who took the extra step to foster those relationships no matter their race. Even participants in schools with a large population of American Indian educators and administrators struggled to find and develop those deep, caring relationships. Again, showing that educators cannot simply depend on the cultural connection to build the foundation of a relationship, dedicated effort must be invested in the relationship building. What skills did those teachers who developed those relationships have that could be taught and reproduced to help other teachers develop deep, caring relationships with students?

Though the discussion of their academic achievement was mentioned, students did not reference needing more tutoring or academic support but instead needed more social and emotional support through these relationships. What does this mean for teacher preparation programs? In what ways are we preparing teachers to foster the intellectual and academic success of students but not teaching them how to support the social and emotional part of students? This finding calls for a holistic approach within

teacher education programs to encourage future teachers to support and address their students in all social, emotional, mental, and intellectual selves.

These findings also allow a space for research concerning the disposition of educators. In the simplest of words, research that seeks to understand “what does it take to educate?” Participants were all able to call forth educators who, in their minds, were great educators because of their ability to connect to the student in a meaningful relationship. Thus, implying that being an educator was much more than simply having a depth and breadth of content knowledge but also a depth and breadth of love and care that could be shown, shared, and reciprocated within the classroom. For Lumbee students, this care and concern is critically important to their academic success and should be well understood by educators who plan to work in heavily populated Lumbee classrooms.

### **Lumbee Researcher, Lumbee Stories, Lumbee Participants: Were Things Too Familiar?**

My connection to this research is woven into the very fabric of who I am. I am Lumbee. My initial perception of this work was that my connection to the Lumbee people and my identity would make breaking the ice and building rapport with participants extremely easy. And I was right. I was able to laugh, joke, and tell stories with the participants because of my relation to the land that we both called home. It was not until I began the coding phase of my work that I realized the distinct barrier this may have posed.

My initial conversations with participants were very casual in nature. We explored their educational stories without too much probing. As I began transcribing the initial set of interviews, one thing was starkly evident, my connection to the topics that

were being discussed left my participants with the distinct notion that there was no need to expand or give additional information. These initial interviews left me searching for valuable quotes to support the points they were making. For example, throughout our conversations, many participants used the phrase “you know.” While, in fact, I did know, as a researcher seeking data to support themes, the phrase “you know” posed a huge problem. Another instance of this was around the discussion of prominent Lumbee cultural activities. Participants replied, more times than not, “well, you know, powwows.” As I began transcribing and coding, I realized that while I had used my identity as a Lumbee tribal member as a point of connection with the participants, in some instances, I would have to disconnect myself in order to push my participants to explain exactly what they meant as opposed to them assuming my familiarity with the topic as a fellow tribal member. With Shelby Jane, Georgia, Ben James, and Cecil, this proved to be extremely difficult. Each of us born, raised, and educated in Hoke County knew about the educational system. In order to slightly disconnect from the stories being told in hopes of obtaining richer descriptions and data I forewarned the participants that I may ask probing questions about the things they share, questions that may confuse them because they are well aware that I understand but questions that would allow for a richer data set.

Though this barrier pushed me to a more focused effort toward probing, I fully believe that my identity as a Lumbee researcher allowed the participants an initial level of familiarity that gave me the richness of powerful stories in the Lumbee dialect. For an experienced researcher, I am sure this novice mistake would have been avoided and for

me was a learning point that I will always take forward into future work. This situation showed me that while my identity gave me a valuable connection, this connection could be taken too far and could possibly muddy the lines between my own voice and the voice of my participants. While, in my mind, the probing on known topics almost seemed redundant, I found it easy. Seeking at times to hear their words through the ears of a non-Lumbee helped me to probe participants for explanations on collard sandwiches, Lumbee Homecoming, and stereotypes.

This barrier also allowed me to shape my work in a way that would be valuable to non-Lumbees working with Lumbee students. What questions would they have? What would they want to know more about? What about our culture is confusing? Does what I am saying make sense? What words need to be defined? I have found one thing overwhelmingly true as a novice researcher, the more questions I seek to answer, the more questions I have to ask.

### **Implications for Practice**

Previous literature related to interacting with American Indian students within the educational context were founded upon studies that primarily included Southwestern tribes as well as an overrepresentation of federally recognized tribes. Neither of which categories included Southeastern tribes or the Lumbee. Understanding the successes, barriers, and strategies for overcoming shared by the 12 participants provided key information into ways in which we can integrate specific strategies into the classroom to better support Lumbee students. These implications for practice provide information for educators, administrators as well as parents in their efforts to help Lumbee students

achieve academically. Interestingly, while the foundational basis of this work was centered on academic achievement, many of the strategies for overcoming as well as the implications for practice fell more towards the emotional and social support that students needed within the classroom.

As an American Indian, history has repeatedly shown the danger of non-American Indian researchers entering Indigenous communities and presenting implications that were not clearly the voice of the American Indian population. Thankfully, as practices and ethics have changed, the voice of the American Indian population is slowly being heard. As I approach the implications for this study, I found one burning desire when it came to what was best for Lumbee students; I was dying to just ask them. What advice do you have for educators, administrators, and parents as they help you navigate the Kindergarten through twelfth grade educational system? What do you need to succeed in the classroom? Questions many had never been given the opportunity to answer, questions to which their answers were powerful and clear.

### **Supporting Lumbee Students in the Classroom**

The genuine care and concern for their educational career that students felt from concerned educators, American Indian and non-American Indian alike, as well as community members and parents was a guiding force in their success. It was this support that participants continued to advocate for. “Support’em, it’s all about support, just support them in whatever they choose to do,” a call for educators and parents that all participants echoed. While the relationship between a parent and a child is often evident, participants called for that relationship to be expanded to a strong concern for the

academic success of students. Participants recalled their parents or caregivers asking questions about their educational success. Questions that, at the time, may not have been wanted, but as Hubert stated, it “showed me that she cared.” The questions were a sign of not only concern and encouragement but also a concerted effort in being involved in various aspects of their students’ lives. The involvement of parents within the educational setting provided additional support for students, support that they could provide in various ways no matter their educational background. Participants, primarily first-generation college students, acknowledged their parents and grandparents educational barriers and appreciated the support and help they received. Whether attending key events, meeting with teachers or simply talking to them about how their classes were going, the support participants wanted, received, and encouraged fell on a broad spectrum. Ultimately, there was a simple call for support.

### **Fostering Relationships**

The support that participants suggested from parents was also called for from educators and school administrators. According to participants, the support they required from non-American Indian educators needed to be fostered by a genuine relationship. “Make’em feel like you care,” Hubert pointed out a critical aspect of culturally relevant teaching, relationship building (Gay, 2010). Educators must seek to build relationships with Lumbee students that are sincere and heartfelt. “Show them that you kinda care about them and then they’ll open up,” Shelby Jane shared information about what she feels would support Lumbee students within the educational system, again, a critical part of Lumbee culture is made apparent, the value of relationships. Hubert appreciated the

critical relationships he built with educators in his educational career, including a guidance counselor, “it might not seem like a lot but it does, it was a lot for me.” Forging a relationship between Lumbee students, families, educational entities, and tribal government could work to create a network for Lumbee students that would provide easy access to various academic opportunities such as scholarships, internships, and summer programs. Building a relationship with students within the educational setting was not only built on a premise of honesty and genuine care but also required a minimal sense of cultural understanding for non-American Indian educators. Oftentimes, these relationships transcended simply a concern for the academics of a student but pushed educators to truly get to know students. This relationship was also reciprocal, allowing students to engage in learning about the educator as well.

While students advocated for the expansion of relationships within the educational system, the aspects of the relationships they called for often extended far beyond what one would perceive as a simply caring; it often ventured into the world of love. Freire (1968) speaks of love as an act of courage that affirms our commitment to others and their efforts toward liberation (loc 1272). For Marion, Georgia, Etta, Purcell, and Ander, the life changing relationships they encountered with educators went beyond a simple concern for their academic success and instead showed a deeper love and concern. For Marion, this was represented by an educator who frequently asked about her culture, supported her extracurricular ventures, and frequently attended cultural events. For Etta, this was an educator who stood by her when she lost her mother, attended her funeral services, and consistently checked up on her in the following years.

For Georgia, this was an educator who saw something within her that she didn't see in herself, a leader, and continued to help her shape and refine her skills as a leader until she was able to take on the leadership and responsibility that he knew could help her shine. These educators are to be applauded for the steps they are taking to holistically love and care for students. It is this love that students are calling for.

It is also this love that I see as playing a huge part in the decolonization of the educational system as educators use the power of this love to learn ways to educate Lumbee students in ways that do not harm them. It is this love that Freire (1968) presents as the transitional power, a true force, that works to join persons in their efforts "to affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free" (loc 623). Freire (1968) goes on to say that not only does this love push us to recognize our position as either oppressed or oppressor but this love is also necessary for us to even engage in dialogue (loc 1269). Our love for the world and others provokes us towards dialogue that breaks barriers, leads to understanding, humanization and a more just society.

The work of love is at the heart of the revolution, the heart of change, the heart of liberation, the heart of social justice (Freire, 1968, loc 1807). "What, indeed, is the deeper motive which moves individuals to become revolutionaries, but the dehumanization of people?" (Freire, 1968, loc 1807). Placing love at the center of the liberation of others, Freire (1968) presents love as an act of courage in which we seek to right the wrongs of our society through our love of others and our commitment to them in their efforts.

Defined by hooks (2010) as “a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust” (p. 159), love finds its place in the classroom. Teaching through a philosophy of love has the power to transform the learning experience for both the educator and the student. As presented by Hackman (2005) educators must be aware of the group dynamics in the classroom, in doing so, the educator may be aware of a great sense of diversity in which students fear engaging in critical exchange. However, hooks (2010) speaks to how the power of love in the educational environment can help students work through critical exchanges “without diminishing anyone’s spirit” (p. 162) as a way to discuss the greater issues of society. Love within the classroom also makes the educator keenly aware of the continually changing dynamics within the classroom in which the lesson and curriculum can be adjusted to create the optimal learning environment for students on a daily basis (hooks, 2010).

It is this radical, dramatic form of love that would wholly support the implementation of a culturally sustaining pedagogy and a Red Pedagogy that seeks to protect and sustain the culture of Lumbee students in the classroom. And it will take this type of love to continue the work of decolonization for both educators and students. While this type of love requires a social and emotional commitment of educators, Lumbee students also called for educators to have a basic understanding of Lumbee culture.

## **Educator Understanding**

The “wonderful sense of community” that Etta found within her school was a key way for educators to not only build a relationship with her as a Lumbee student but was also a critical way for non-American Indian educators to get a cultural understanding of the Lumbee people. “There needs to be a cultural competency...a general understanding of like you know, how Lumbee culture functions,” an understanding that Louise felt like would give non-American Indian educators insight into the ways Lumbee students and their families “tick”. Hubert encouraged educators to “get to know the people a little bit better” and “go around in the community and go to some different activities that they have.” His advice dually supports Marion’s request that non-American Indian educators seek to be courteous and understanding of cultural events.

Brayboy and Castagno (2008) posit educators as the “primary sites of change” (p. 48) within communities. Entrusted with the power to share knowledge with students, the role of the educator is powerful to the least. An educator who has worked diligently to understand the cultural attributes of the Lumbee people and in turn integrates them meticulously throughout their classroom with a demeanor of appreciation is an example of an educator who is working critically with Lumbee students in a way that will not harm them but instead will push them in a positive direction (Brayboy & McCarty, 2013, p. 2).

## **Lumbee Culture and the Classroom**

The participants painted a striking story of invisibility within today’s educational system. A story that misaligns with culturally relevant teaching experts Gay (2010) and

Ladson-Billings (1995) who encourage the integration of students' culture within every part of the classroom and is powerfully opposite the culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2012) and culturally revitalizing pedagogy (McCarty & Lee, 2014) that would truly allow the Lumbee culture to find its place in the classroom. In order for educators to work towards a culturally revitalizing curriculum and cultural sustainability within their classrooms, educators must seek to understand and learn about the surrounding tribal community and must work diligently to integrate culture into their classrooms (Powers et al, 2003, p. 19; Yurkovich, 2001, p. 266; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007, p. 87).

Through key tribal community relationships, non-American Indian educators can seek to not only understand Lumbee culture but can integrate it into their curriculum in various ways. Whether discussing the "War at Hayes Pond," contemporary issues such as federal recognition, or cultural aspects such as the development of the Lumbee pinecone patchwork regalia, there are a plethora of topics that can find their home in the educational curriculum. This can foster, not only critical tribal knowledge for all students, in turn defeating stereotypes, but also help Lumbee students work towards positive identity development through allowing them to see themselves represented in the classroom and in the curriculum in a positive, non-stereotypical manner.

Throughout the stories presented by the participants, another prevalent relationship that participants wanted to see was that of the Lumbee Tribal government. The lack of support that Purcell saw from the Lumbee Tribal government was a point of frustration, "I would like to see more support from the tribal government. I see it from my fellow Lumbee people but the government itself, from the administrators, I don't. I

don't see it at all.” Purcell, Bazie, as well as Louise also prefaced a call for increased Lumbee Tribal government representation within the school as well as increased reach of Indian Education services. The role that Indian Education played in the lives of participants who had adequate access to it was evident and the role that students needed it to play came across clearly. The Indian Education program, established as resource to support the academic success of American Indian students, clearly did that and so much more. The Indian Education program integrates American Indian personnel in schools where representation is limited, provides a familiar face and a common connection, and provides essential post-secondary exploration opportunities to American Indian students. An expansion of the services offered to touch all Lumbee children in Hoke, Scotland, Robeson, and Cumberland Counties is necessary.

### **Moving Forward**

Today’s classroom is a tedious place for students, parents, educators, and administrators. School is a place that is often under-resourced and underfunded, a reality for students attending schools in lower socioeconomic districts. Literature provides a wealth of truth related to the realities of students of color in the classroom, however, literature has long rendered the Lumbee experience invisible. This work sought to fill that void. Through this work I sought to forefront the oral histories of Lumbee tribal young adults and the barriers they faced within the educational system while also bringing forth the successes that are so often ignored.

The work presented here is a sad reality of Lumbee students “robbed of the right to be Indigenous” (Grande, 2015, p. 15). All of who seek their own self-identification

and sovereignty as Lumbee students (Brayboy, 2009, p. 439-440), but are forced to forgo their Indigenous Knowledge Systems for a world that has long sought to assimilate them. Related literature and relevant studies frequently speak of the importance of the integration of culture, the value of relationships, the need for high expectations, and the damaging effects of stereotypes (Ladson-Billings, 2010; Santamaria, 2009; Gay, 2010). I write these words with urgency. While I fully believe that many Lumbee students have the strength to live their own Red Pedagogy, they should not have to do so alone. The Lumbee have lost generations of youth to wars, genocide, boarding schools, civilization, and now cultural cleansing. As researchers, educators, scholars, and tribal members, we must work to reimagine our classrooms and our schools as sites of “Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination” (Grande, 2004 as quoted in Pochedly, 2015, p. 293). More importantly we must empower our Lumbee students through the use of Red Pedagogy by valuing and incorporating their Indigenous Knowledge Systems, acknowledging them within the educational space and working tirelessly to decolonize our minds and our curriculum.

This work is for the next generation of Lumbee scholars. Seeking to find their place and share their voice. As a researcher, as a scholar, as an American Indian, and as a Lumbee, I firmly believe the words of Wilma Mankiller that Grande (2015, p. 15) shared, “the war for Indian children will be won in the classroom.” Let this work be a weapon for Lumbee students in that war.

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APPENDIX A  
INTEREST QUESTIONNAIRE

**Study Interest Form**

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being completed by me, Leslie Locklear, a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and a member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. This research study seeks to learn more about the educational experiences of Lumbee Tribal young adult's ages 18 to 26 who were educated in Hoke, Scotland, Cumberland and Robeson Counties. This research study is being done as a part of my doctoral program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Please complete the below interest form and I will be in contact with you as soon as possible. Thanks so much for your time and interest!

\* Required

1. Name (First & Last) \* \_\_\_\_\_

2. Tribal Affiliation \* *Mark only one oval.*

Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Age \* \_\_\_\_\_

4. Email Address \* \_\_\_\_\_

5. Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Which county did you receive a majority of your K12 education in? \* *Mark only one oval.*
- Hoke County
  - Robeson County
  - Scotland County
  - Cumberland County
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Highest level of educational attainment? *Mark only one oval.*
- Some high school
  - High School Diploma
  - Some college
  - Associate's Degree
  - Bachelor's Degree
  - Graduate Degree
8. If you are currently enrolled in an institution of higher education, what institution do you attend?
9. If you are currently employed, where are you employed, what is your job title?
10. How would you define your traditional cultural involvement (i.e. powwows, dancing, drumming, etc.) *Mark only one oval.*
- No Involvement
  - Minimal Involvement (attend 1-2 events a year)
  - Slightly Involved (attend more than 3-4 events a year)
  - Moderately Involved (attend 5-6 or more events a year)
  - Heavily Involved (attend 6 or more events a year)
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Are you willing to participate in 2 one hour face-to-face interviews as well as a one--hour focus group? *Mark only one oval.*
- Yes
  - No
  - Maybe

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I would like to talk to you today about your educational experiences in the Kindergarten through 12th grade classroom. As you know, storytelling and oral histories are a critical way that we share our stories as Lumbee people. This plays a huge role in my work. Please feel free to expand as much as you want on any given question. Feel free to share your story. As we walk through these questions, I want you to know that I am interested in hearing your stories as they relate to the successes and barriers you faced from Kindergarten through 12th grade.

Before we talk more about your educational experiences, I would like to learn a little more about you. You are a part of this work because you identify as a member of the Lumbee tribe.

- What does being Lumbee mean to you?
  - How would you describe Lumbee Tribal culture?
  - How are you involved in Lumbee culture?
- I would like to learn more about the community you grew up in.
  - What county did you grow up in?
  - Talk to me about your community.
  - Tell me about the racial makeup of your neighborhood/ your school/ your friend group.
  - Could you tell me more about your connection to the Lumbee community?
  - (if living outside of the community) Could you tell me more about the connections you have maintained with the primary Lumbee community?
    - Why did you maintain these connections despite not living in the area?
- Before we talk specifically about some of the successes and barriers you faced within the K-12 educational system, I'd like to just learn about your time in school as a Lumbee student.
  - Tell me what school was like for you.
    - How did you do in school academically?
      - Did you consider yourself a good student? Why or why not?
    - What grades did you receive in school?

- Could you tell me more about what courses you took in high school? Academic, AP, Honors, etc.
    - What was school like for you emotionally and socially?
  - What percentage of students in your school was Lumbee?
  - What was the racial makeup of your primary friend group/ your teachers/ the school administration?
  - What was it like being a Lumbee student?
  - How often did you think about being Lumbee as a student?
    - What evoked these thoughts?
    - If you didn't think about it often why do you think that was?
- Your story as a Lumbee tribal young adult plays a powerful role in the way that we understand how today's educational system is working to support or inhibit Lumbee students. What would you say is your greatest success within the K-12 public school system? Could you tell me the story of this success?
  - When did this success take place (grade)?
    - At this time, could you tell me more about the school/ class you attended? Racial makeup, location, size, etc (as much detail as possible).
  - What/ who helped you achieve that?
  - In what ways were you supported?
  - What role did Lumbee tribal cultural play in your success?
  - What barriers did you overcome to achieve this success?
  - Where there any additional barriers that could have inhibited your success?
  - What other resources would have made this achievement easier?
  - What adults, tribal leaders, school administrators or teachers played a role in helping you?
  - How did you celebrate this success?
  - Who helped you celebrate this success?
  - Who do you wish would have helped to celebrate this success?
  - Why do you consider this your greatest success?
  - Could you tell me about what you think your next greatest success will be?
  - I know I previously asked you to share your greatest success, could you tell me about any other successes.

- While we all have great successes, our stories also have their own valleys. What would you consider your greatest barrier within the K-12 public school system? Could you tell me the story of this barrier?
  - What/ who was this barrier?
  - When did you recognize this barrier/ when did it appear?
  - When did this barrier take place (grade)?
    - At this time, could you tell me more about the school/ class you attended? Racial makeup, location, size, etc (as much detail as possible).
  - In what way was this a barrier? What did it *barricade* you from?
  - If you were not able to overcome this barrier, please tell me why. If you were able to overcome this barrier, please tell me how.
  - Who/ what supported you in these efforts?
  - What role did your Lumbee tribal culture play in helping you to overcome this barrier? (if at all)
  - Thinking back to the barrier, what would have helped you overcome this barrier?
  - What resources/ people?
  - Is this barrier still an issue for you?
  - I know that I previously asked you to discuss your greatest barrier, could you tell me about any other barriers?
  
- What advice do you have for teachers and/or school administrators about what can be done to best support Lumbee students?
  
- What advice do you have for parents about what they can do to best support their children while in school?
  
- Given that I'm interested in the experiences of Lumbee tribal youth in today's educational system, is there anything else you would like to share with me that I might not have thought to ask?

## APPENDIX C

### FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Setting: All chairs are in a circle

Introduction:

PI introduction, the study, and the process for a focus group, states that she will be audio recording, asks if there are any questions, begins with participant introductions

#### **Questions**

- What does it mean to you to be Lumbee?
- What was school like for you?
- What success did you experience?
- What challenges did you experience?
- What should educators know about working with Lumbee students to support academic success and a good experience overall?

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION TABLE

<i>Participant Information</i>			
<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>County of Residence</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education Attainment</b>
Etta	Robeson County	24	Bachelor's degree; pursuing Master's degree
Shelby Jane	Hoke County	26	Master's degree
Callie	Robeson County	25	Bachelor's degree
Cecil	Hoke County	26	High school diploma; began college, did not finish
Ben James	Hoke County	22	High school diploma; Trade certification
Georgia	Hoke County	23	Bachelor's degree; pursuing Master's degree
Purcell	Scotland County	22	Bachelor's degree
Bazie	Cumberland County	24	Bachelor's degree; pursuing graduate degree
Marion	Cumberland County	18	High school diploma; pursuing Bachelor's degree
Hubert	Robeson County	21	High school diploma
Louise	Robeson County	26	Master's degree
Ander	Robeson County	24	High school diploma; began college, did not finish; Trade certification

APPENDIX E  
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hello [INSERT NAME]—

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being completed by me, Leslie Locklear, a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and a member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. This research study seeks to learn more about the educational experiences of Lumbee Tribal young adult's ages 18 to 26. This research study is being done as a part of my doctoral program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

I am asking you to participate in this research study because I feel that as a young adult and as a member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina your ideas; opinions and experiences within the K-12 classroom are valuable to the future success of the Lumbee Tribal children.

The information shared during this research study will be solely held by me and your confidentiality will be protected to the best of my ability by using fake names and keeping the data secured on my password locked computer. During this research study I would like to do face-to-face interviews that will last approximately 1 hour followed by focus group, or larger group discussion that will last approximately 2.5 hours. These will not take place on the same day. For both the interview and the focus group, I would like to audio record the conversation. I will be the only one using this data and the recordings will be destroyed once the study is finished.

Upon completion of the interviews, I will transcribe them and would like to share them with you for your approval. With your approval, I will then move forward with my write-up, which will also be shared with you following their completion. At any point in time, your feedback is welcome to ensure that the thoughts and opinions you portray are correctly stated. If at any point in time you no longer wish to participate in the research study you can just let me know and any data associated with you will no longer be used.

There are no significant risks associated with your participation in this research study but the information you provide could lead to a better understanding of Lumbee tribal students' experiences for future researchers as well as myself.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating

Leslie Locklear

## APPENDIX F

### IRB CONSENT FORM

#### UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

Project Title: Healing: The Stories of Lumbee Tribal Young Adults

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor:

Leslie Locklear

Cell: 910-374-6183

Email: lalockle@uncg.edu

Participant's Name: Leslie Locklear

Dr. Silvia Bettez

Phone: 336-256-0156

Email: scbettez@uncg.edu

#### What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty. Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

#### What is the study about?

Your participation is voluntary. Leslie Locklear, a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, is conducting a research study to learn more about the educational successes and barriers that Lumbee Tribal young adults face. Through this research study Leslie hopes to gain insight into the current educational system as it relates to Lumbee Tribal students as well as ways in which Lumbee Tribal young adults would improve today's K-12 educational system.

#### Why are you asking me?

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina between the ages of 18-26 residing in the state of North Carolina.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

You will be asked to participate in two face-to-face interview that will last approximately one hour each in which you will be asked about the successes and barriers you faced within the K-12 educational system as well as your suggestions on how to improve it for Lumbee Tribal students. Following these face-to-face interview, you will also be asked to participate in a focus group with other Lumbee Tribal young adults for a larger discussion on this topic. Following all interviews, you will be asked to review interviews transcriptions for accuracy.

Is there any audio/video recording?

The researcher will audiotape you during the face-to-face interview as well as the focus group. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

What are the risks to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Leslie Locklear who may be reached at (910) 374-6183 or [lalockle@uncg.edu](mailto:lalockle@uncg.edu) or Dr. Silvia Bettez who may be reached at (336) 681-2481 or [scbettez@uncg.edu](mailto:scbettez@uncg.edu).

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

The benefits of your participation in this study may lead to a greater communal involvement of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina in the surrounding educational system.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits for your participation in this study.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?

Your privacy will be protected by having all hard copies of documents stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home. All electronic files will be kept on UNCG's password protected cloud storage system, BOX. Participants in this study will not be identified by name when data is disseminated. Participants in this study will be given the liberty to choose their own alias as representation.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data that has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Leslie Locklear.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please,

Email me a scanned copy of this document to: \_\_\_\_\_

Provide me with a hard copy of this document