

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT
Indigenous Educational Policy Development with Tribal Governments: A Case Study
Nicole R. Bowman-Farrell (Mohican/Munsee)
PhD Oral Defense
Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis Department, University of WI-Madison
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Western public education research rarely includes empirical information about or formal consultation with sovereign Tribal governments and Indigenous stakeholders. This lack has led to gaps in services, poor resource allocation, inappropriate programming, and a chronic systemic failure of the public educational system to meet the needs of American Indian (AI) learners. To address these issues and gaps, Indigenous scholars and advocates work towards operationalizing Indian civil rights. The purpose of this “Indigenized” descriptive single case study was to document the educational policy-making process of one Tribe by exploring the following research questions:

- How does the Stockbridge-Munsee (S-M) government develop educational policy?
- What influences the Stockbridge-Munsee government’s policy making process?

Guiding frameworks of the study included Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Tribal Critical Theory (TCT). Additionally, the methodological constructs of community-based participatory research (CBPR), Tribally-based participatory research (TDPR), and an understanding of the multi-jurisdictional legal framework of American Indian research informed the study design and ensured cultural responsiveness, scientific rigor, and adherence to ethical, professional, and legal standards. Self-assessment surveys and interviews were conducted with 27 participants (unduplicated count) representing Tribal government, local and state education agencies, and the Tribal community. Key documents were collected from participants, online, and from Tribal, local, state and federal agency records. Constant comparative analysis and triangulating data allowed emerging themes to be confirmed through multiple data sources. This study had three major findings:

1. Developing Tribal educational policy is a contextualized and multiple step process. The S-M educational policy system is a series of intra-Tribal interactions. Policy is created in multiple steps involving the Tribal government, Tribal Education Board, and Tribal Education Department. Each of these Tribal educational policy stakeholder groups has distinct roles in the policy process.
2. Multiple factors influence Tribal education policy development. These include “cross-cutting” influences as well as community, cultural/traditional and public/western education influences.
3. Tribal and public educational policy activities vary across educational agencies and affect the policy environment, inter-agency relations, and perceptions of educational stakeholders.

Findings from the study suggest that multi-jurisdictional policy structures and activities that explicitly foster intergovernmental relations across local, state, federal, and Tribal government agencies will best support public school education of American Indian students.

Key study findings/discussion points

1. First and one-of-a kind multi-jurisdictional study that views Tribal and public governments/agencies (local, state, and federal) as part of a larger policy system (via tri-lateral model).
2. Use of a multi-jurisdictional model, Indigenous theories, and Indigenous research methods/tools can inform future public educational policy research studies and educational policy activities between Tribal and public education agencies.
3. Fills a gap in the western and Indigenous literature, documents what is working (strengths-based approach), and builds empirical data for supporting a multi-jurisdictional or tri-lateral model for educational policy and practice collaborations between Tribal and non-Tribal government agencies.
4. TCT used for asserting sovereign rights of Tribes, which is legal, culturally responsive, and ethical.
5. CRT gives counter-narrative to marginalized voices to document strengths, gaps, challenges, and solutions.

Limitations of the study include sample size and the need to replicate more case studies to build the literature base. Given that this is the first study of its kind, it was challenging to “build on the literature base” in terms of a comprehensive and multi-jurisdictional study. Policy studies with programs or agencies (not comprehensively across governments) were utilized to anchor and inform the study.

Future areas of study

1. Replication: more multi-jurisdictional (i.e. tri-lateral) educational policy studies are needed to fill a gap in the western and Indigenous literature bases. Replicating this study will provide more empirical information about how Tribes develop educational policies (and what those policies include) and will also document strengths and successful educational policy development, a strengths-based and Tribal-centric approach to education.
2. Systemic educational policy studies are needed to generate more empirical data for further developing, applying, and testing the tri-lateral model in different Tribal/public contexts.
3. Studying the similarities and differences in Tribal and public educational policy development is important to understanding the policy environment and educational leadership behaviors that strengthen public education for AI students. This information also would provide a deeper and broader perspective into what resources and capacities Tribal governments need to strengthen Tribal educational policy development.
4. Correlating or connecting the educational outcomes of AI students in schools with strong Tribal/public policies, policy activities, and policy resources, capacities, and supports is important to understanding the educational experiences and achievement of AI students in K-12 public schools.
5. Studying how stronger or weaker levels of direct funding and other resources impact Tribal and public educational policy development, implementation, fidelity, and impacts of policies for AI attending K-12 schools can inform leadership, governance, economic, and educational stakeholders and contexts.