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This is a post-review version of the following article:

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March/April 2017

The final publication will be available via Anthropology News at:

<https://doi.org/10.1111/AN.383>

Citation for this paper:

Chew, K.A.B. & Anthony-Stevens (2017). Teaching from a Place of Hope in Indigenous Education. *Anthropology News*, 58(2), e265-e269. <https://doi.org/10.1111/AN.383>

Teaching from a Place of Hope in Indigenous Education
Kari A. B. Chew and Vanessa Anthony-Stevens

The Council on Anthropology and Education's Standing Committee on Indigenous Education has had a presence at the Annual Meetings of the American Anthropology Association over the past decade. The CAE Indigenous Education Standing Committee #7 is dedicated to the exploration of anthropology of education from an Indigenous perspective. Member activities focus on engaging in theoretical and methodological discussions central to the field of Indigenous education, particularly those related to power differentials, knowledge, identity, schooling, agency and appropriation, and persistence. Committee #7 is committed to understanding the experiences, perspectives, and epistemological frameworks of Indigenous peoples through their own words, and works to privilege Indigenous scholarship and collaborative research in the anthropology of education. The following article shares key highlights from a session at last year's American Anthropological Association Meetings that was sponsored by the Standing Committee on Indigenous Education.

Damage-centered research (Tuck, 2009) abounds and reinforces stereotypes that Indigenous peoples, cultures, and languages are primitive, conquered, and vanishing. Consequently, the relevancy of hope in Indigenous language and cultural reclamation is often diminished from research questions and conceptual assumptions. As members of CAE's Standing Committee on Indigenous Education, the 2016 Annual Meeting theme 'Evidence, Accident, Discovery' caught our attention due to its inherent colonial assumptions of traditional anthropological claims. We questioned the positionality and power within determining *what* is considered evidence, *who* gets to decide what is discovered or reclaimed in contexts of Indigenous education, and *for* whose purposes and benefit? Our session at the 2016 Annual Meeting, titled *Beyond Cultural Responsiveness in Indigenous Education: Teaching from a Place of Hope*, decidedly engaged a growing body of scholarship underscoring hopefulness, complexity, and self-determination central to the work of Indigenous language and culture reclamation.

In exploration of what it means to sustain and revitalize cultural and linguistic practice through pedagogy (McCarty & Lee, 2014), panelists in this session drew on personal experience and research to convey persistence and optimism—in higher education, community driven language education, and K-12 educational leadership. As the session organizers, we sought to emphasize the vitality and efficacy of reclamation work by bringing focus to individuals and communities (re)turning to, (re)valuing, and actively using their ancestral tongues and ways of knowing as forms of self-determination and community sovereignty. Of importance was the inclusion of the voices of emerging Indigenous scholars of Anthropology and Education: Chew (Chickasaw), Amanda LeClair-Diaz (Eastern Shoshone/Northern Arapaho), and Angel Sobotta (Nez Perce). Contributing their narratives as Indigenous scholars, discussants Philip Stevens (San Carlos Apache) and Sheilah E. Nicholas (Hopi) wove together the dynamic and non-linear stories of resistance, resilience, and hope. Together, the panelists and discussants emphasized pedagogies of hope embedded in Indigenous language and culture education.

The papers brought together a variety of culturally- and geographically-situated perspectives about what it means to enact education from a place of hope *by* Indigenous peoples, *for* Indigenous communities. Sobotta, drawing on nineteen years of experience as a language coordinator for her *Niimiipuu* (Nez Perce) community, held that as Indigenous people we must

self-determine the metaphors that relate to our view of ourselves. Terms commonly imposed on Indigenous languages and cultures, like “dead,” “moribund,” and “extinct,” are metaphors meant to eradicate Indigenous peoples. When we view our languages through a framework of hope, we understand that they are living beings. We may teach the language, but the language also teaches us—offering us wisdom through our stories, songs, and prayers.

Extending concepts of Indigenous education for decolonization and Indigenous sovereignties built on “contingency with the beliefs, and understandings of the past” (Grande, 2004, p. 250), panelists positioned hope as a dynamic, non-linear, and, at times, bottom-up process. Chew’s work was grounded in the stories of Chickasaw people who have restructured and dedicated their lives to ensuring the continuance of their language. When she began her research, many Chickasaws cited fear stemming from the perceived urgency of language decline as a primary motivation for learning and teaching the language. Through the building and strengthening of relationships across generations and geographic spaces over time, this fear became overshadowed by a force much more powerful: hope. Thus, for the first time in recent history, fluent speakers and language learners alike envisioned a future where *Chikashshanompa’*, the Chickasaw language, is spoken. This kind of hopeful imagination repositioned relationships as the continuous tension between perspective and action. Relationality, in this way, is understood as the avenue(s) of dynamic opportunity centered outside of solely the western anthropological concept of the empirical, or Indigenous, pre-colonial epistemologies.

Each of the papers in this session explored the tension of naming colonial logics and practices, which constrain hope, while privileging the naming of relationships, intersections, and opportunities fundamental to the situated nature of locating and operationalizing hope. LeClair-Diaz’s autoethnographic account of what it means to navigate academia as an Eastern Shoshone/Northern Arapaho woman, challenged identity binaries that carry the vestiges of the colonial reservation legacy. To indigenize academic spaces and initiate change for other Native students, LeClair-Diaz began a journey of (re)claiming and (re)centering her tribal epistemologies in her identity as a scholar and educator. “I had to try and discover what it meant to be Eastern Shoshone *and* Northern Arapaho not only for research purposes but so that I could start feeling like a whole person,” she shared. By naming places and actions of hope, knowledge of self and cultural and linguistic resources are returned to within the community, generating new narratives which merge what is, what was, and what will be from the perspective of Indigenous scholars.

During our session in Minneapolis, it was apparent that hope be approached with caution. Even in the comfort of major convention centers, we recognize that hope involves vulnerability and risk. This apparent reality is nothing new for Indigenous communities. The current racially-charged political climate does little to exacerbate the colonial hegemony at work in Indigenous education; it merely makes this country’s colonial legacy more apparent. In reflection of our session, we left Minneapolis with both deep concerns about the political future of the U.S., and with persisting resolve to continue the traditions and uphold the sovereignty of Indigenous communities through educational practices. Our work furthers the efforts of many to trouble the discursive imaginaries we use to engage Indigenous worldviews in schools and the academy. Against the backdrop of constant risk, the ethnographic and autoethnographic perspectives featured in this session injected oxygen into suffocating colonial discourse of loss and salvation.

Teaching from a place of hope, as explored in this session, emerges from continuity, persistence and relationships. These characteristics are needed today, just as they were needed yesterday.

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Photo from AAA 2016 (participants from left to right: Dr. Vanessa Anthony-Stevens, Angel Sobotta, Amanda LeClair-Diaz, Dr. Kari Chew, Dr. Sheilah E. Nicholas, Dr. Philip Stevens).

