

# **Cooperative Extension in Indigenous Communities: Characteristics of Successful Educators**

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## **Abstract**

*Land Grant Institutions (LGIs) and Cooperative Extension were founded to bring educational access to the states they serve. In contrast to this mission and the ubiquitous nature of Extension services in US counties, Extension offices can only be found in a small number of indigenous communities. Despite these inequities, there are Extension educators collaborating with indigenous communities to provide agricultural and community development programming. To understand the characteristics of successful collaborations, this project investigated educators in the Western Region of Extension to learn about their lived experiences. This investigation was done through a transformative convergent mixed methods study utilizing a survey and interviews. Participants revealed characteristics that make educators successful which include being involved in their communities, building long-term and trusting relationships, developing academic and contextual understanding of the communities they serve, being willing to learn, and developing allyship. Recommendations include how Extension can better support educators and the tensions between Extension's and educator's definitions of "success" in their work. Only by understanding and supporting collaborations between educators and indigenous communities can Extension hope to encourage these collaborations and fulfill their mission of equity and inclusion.*

## **Introduction**

Land Grant Institutions (LGIs) and Cooperative Extension were founded to bring access, education, and agricultural support to the citizens of the states they serve and both benefit from a public perception of perpetuating democracy and inclusion. This mission included the teaching of agriculture and the mechanical arts, as well as classical studies, so that members of the working classes could obtain an education. This was important work for rural America and continues to be today, with an Extension office in or near all of the 3,000 counties in the US (Hiller, 2005) and serving nearly 100% of US counties (Brewer et al., 2016). However, LGIs and Extension have a complicated history associated with colonization and still do not serve all communities equitably. To understand the experiences of Extension Educators in indigenous communities, the following research question was asked: What characteristics of Extension educators help them to successfully serve indigenous communities?

## **Extension in Indigenous Communities**

The Morrill Act of 1862 gave land to LGIs, but that land was the product of indigenous land dispossession (Stein, 2017). Assimilation through agriculture and alienation from traditional foodways were tactics that colonists used as well (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015; Harris, 2004; Knobloch, 1996). This history contributes to the inequitable access to the education services of Extension that indigenous communities experience today. In recognition of these issues, the Equity in Educational Land Grant Status Act was signed in 1994, granting Tribal Colleges land grant status and resources to support research and education (NIFA, 2018). This Act also gave funds from the United States Department of Agriculture to Tribal Colleges for Extension programs (Hiller, 2005). Further, the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) places Extension personnel in indigenous communities, and most 1994 LGIs have Extension personnel on their campuses, but both programs are underfunded and unable to provide equitable support. As a result, Extension offices can only be found in less than 10% of indigenous communities (Brewer et al., 2016; NCAI, 2010). Due to the limited literature addressing the prevalence of Extension in the Western Region specifically, this research aims to provide a foundational

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understanding of Extension in the region to better understand Extension programming in indigenous communities in the West.

Some authors have brought attention to the educational inequities that indigenous communities face, in their access to Extension services (Hiller, 2005), the kinds of programs available (Hassel, 2004; Emm & Breazeale, 2008) or both (Martenson, Newman, & Zac, 2011) and provide possible explanations and solutions. While these topics are beyond the scope of this paper, the types of programs that are successful in indigenous communities have been examined (Hartmann, 2021) as well as the characteristics of those programs (Hartmann & Martin, 2021).

### Allyship

The idea of the “allied other”, has been discussed by indigenous and non-indigenous scholars to deconstruct systems of power and to elevate marginalized voices (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Jankie, 2004; Kaomea, 2004). Allyship has many definitions and looks different in different contexts, but in general, allies are “...individuals from a privileged group who make intentional choices to support or work for the rights of those from the oppressed group” (Goodman, 2011, p. 157). Allies for social justice, according to Goodman (2011), act based on an understanding of “...their own socialization and privilege, the oppression experienced by the target group, and the intersecting nature of systems of inequality” (p. 160). In various definitions of allyship, a constant is a recognition of an inequitable distribution of power and an active support of the marginalized group (Bishop, 2002; Brown & Ostrove, 2013). Lorde (2007) would encourage us to embrace these differences, as sources of creativity and community-building. It is this recognition of difference that is both necessary to understand how systems of oppression affect people differently, and as a source of power to fight against them, “In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower” (p. 112).

The concept of allyship is not without its criticisms. Scholars have questioned whether it is allyship that we should be striving for, as opposed to a solidarity to decolonizing practices (Kluttz, Walker, & Walter, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2012) in the case of indigenous and non-indigenous allyship, because of the ideology and effects of colonialism. Solidarity creates goals for all involved based on social change that eliminates oppression, recognizing that our futures are interconnected. Land (2015) explains this distinction between understanding that we are all connected by a system of oppression and wishing to address that system, instead of engaging in allyship for self-interest:

We are part of the system, we are the system, we are colonialism. To be a reliable ally, then, is to critique the system, to attempt to change the system, to reduce our level of colonial involvement, to undermine its logics and to try to convince ourselves and others that the system – which does its most violent work on Indigenous people – is also not in our (enlightened) self-interest. (p. 215)

In this way, solidarity also centers indigenous epistemologies and goals, while respecting sovereignty and self-determination and is not about working towards settler goals or futures (Kluttz, Walker, & Walter, 2020; Mignolo, 2009)

Solidarity also acknowledges that decolonization is an on-going process of learning because colonization itself was not an event; it is a structure that still informs our epistemologies, politics, and social interactions. Because of how colonization has embedded itself in our minds and discourse, Morris (2017) emphasizes that decolonization is a practice that, “includes nurturing a habit of discomfort” (p. 456), while building relationships between indigenous peoples, non-indigenous peoples, and land. Tuck and Yang (2012) also call for non-indigenous peoples to take up decolonizing colonial practices, but stress that, “this joining cannot be too easy, too open, too settled. Solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict” (p. 3). Still, as complex as solidarity may be as we unlearn and relearn within this context, it is also a,

... process whereby we intend the conditions we want to live and intend the social relations we wish to have. It is a process that forces us to reconnect with each other and the Earth.

This means not just being present for blockades or in moments of crisis, but developing an ongoing commitment to the wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples and communities on a daily basis. (Walia, 2012, p.251)

### Materials and Methods

This project practiced decolonizing methodology. Decolonizing research asks researchers to consider Western ways of knowing, evaluate their legitimacy, and consider how our positionality impacts knowledge creation (Battiste, 2008). This deconstructs Western research traditions and problematizes the relationship between knowledge and power (Jankie, 2004). Decolonizing methodologies must embrace the collaborative nature of indigenous knowledge creation systems and the connectedness between people, communities, and the natural world by including participant collaboration at all phases (Battiste, 2008; Battiste & Youngblood, 2009; Cajete & Pueblo, 2010; Falcón, 2016; Latulippe, 2015; Mutua & Swadener, 2004). While the methods of research are a survey and interviews, both of which are prevalent in colonized, Western research, the methodology strived to be decolonizing by centering the values outlined above and prioritizing counternarratives and the co-construction of knowledge with participants (Fierros & Delgado, 2016).

In addressing these systemic issues in Extension, the following research question is relevant: What characteristics of Extension educators help them to successfully serve indigenous communities? To answer this question, a transformative convergent mixed methods design received IRB approval and was employed. The research area was the Western Region of Extension, which is large and has communities with unique cultures, goals, and constraints. The Western Region of Extension was chosen because of the prevalence and diversity of indigenous communities. Because of this, combining quantitative and qualitative methods provided a more complete answer to the research question (Creswell & Clark, 2018) and allowed for triangulation, complementarity, and a deeper, more rigorous understanding of the findings possible (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006). Transformative design allows for value-based, action-oriented research, that directly engages community members (Mertens, 2010; Mertens, 2011). This can include theoretical frameworks that can then be incorporated into the design elements of the study (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2018). Transformative design was implemented because it is collaborative and participatory, allowing for an overlap with decolonizing methodologies (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

Despite these systemic issues, there are 1862 LGI Extension educators that collaborate with indigenous communities, at the county and state levels and in collaboration with 1994 Tribal College Extension programs. To better understand the characteristics of successful 1862 Extension educators serving indigenous communities, the researchers investigated the Western Region of Extension through a transformative convergent mixed methods study. Because of the large area and associated complexity, a survey instrument was used to gain an overview of the existing collaborations. To understand specific examples more deeply, educators from 1862 LGIs that collaborate with indigenous communities were interviewed. The interviews and survey responses revealed the characteristics that make educators successful including the need to get involved with the communities, building trusting relationships, developing an academic understanding of the historical and cultural context, being willing to learn, and developing allyship. From the findings of this study, the participants and researcher co-constructed implications.

### Data collection and analysis

The survey and interview questions were created in collaboration with the stakeholders of this work, including the participants. There were a total of 20 survey questions, but because of the branching structure of the survey, the most questions that a respondent might answer was 11 questions. The first survey questions asked respondents about their location, job responsibilities, and whether they currently or have ever collaborated with indigenous communities as part of their jobs. If they currently or have ever worked with indigenous communities, the survey questions mirrored the interview questions and

focused on their experiences working in those communities in order to gather a wide variety of experiences throughout the region. If the respondents answered that they have never worked with indigenous communities, they were asked why that was and if they would ever be interested in that type of programming. Both responses allowed the creation of the maps included here that represent the distribution of Extension educators in indigenous communities in the West.

The interview protocol was semi-structured and utilized the survey questions as initial interview questions. Since all of the interview participants currently work with indigenous communities, the questions focused on their experiences. In keeping with the concept that storytelling is important in decolonized knowledge creation (Brayboy, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), the direction of the interview was allowed to evolve as the participants' experiences and perspectives directed them, with an emphasis on the mutual co-construction of ideas and researcher reflexivity (Fierros & Delgado, 2016). This also serves to disrupt the traditional power dynamics of the interview process (Falcón, 2016). Interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. With permission from participants, the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Because this is a mixed methods study, data analysis focused on the goals of each component of the design and integrated the results to form a more coherent picture of the conclusions (Creswell & Clark, 2018). To analyze the interviews and the qualitative components of the survey, thematic analysis was used (Bazeley, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The last five themes of the results section emerged from analyzing both the interview and qualitative survey data concurrently. Because the communities involved helped to develop the goals and research questions, the data analysis remained closely associated with those goals to successfully represent the community's interests. From there, compelling examples were selected and related the analysis back to the research questions and theoretical perspectives in order to write up conclusions and discussion (Bazeley, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2006). During all stages of this process, participants had opportunities to provide feedback, including reviewing their transcripts and the research findings, and collaborating on the discussion and recommendations that emerged from this research. As such, participant quotes and recommendations are included in the Discussion alongside of the researcher's.

## Results

### Participants' locations and descriptions

The Western region of Extension includes 13 states (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming), American Samoa, Guam, Micronesia, and the Northern Mariana Islands. The State Extension Directors were asked to distribute the survey to all Extension personnel in their state, with three subsequent emails requesting their participation in two-week intervals after the initial request. For the interviews, sampling was a mixture of convenience and purposive (Bazeley, 2020). In total, the data collection between the survey and interviews was completed over a nine-month period. As stated above, this was a convergent mixed methods study, meaning that the survey and the interviews were conducted simultaneously, given their different scope and aims. Participants' specific locations, universities, reservations, and job titles have been removed from their quotes to protect their identities, and pseudonyms have been used. The distribution of survey responses can be seen in Table 1, including how each State responded to Question 4: "Do you currently or have you ever served indigenous peoples or communities?" Respondents could choose one of three answers: "I CURRENTLY serve indigenous peoples or communities", "I have in the PAST served indigenous peoples or communities", or "I have NEVER served indigenous peoples or communities". If they chose the third option, they were directed to a question that read, "Would you be interested in serving indigenous peoples or communities?" to which they could have chosen, "Yes" or "No".

Table 1

*Survey Responses by State*

State/ US Territory	Number of Responses	Response Rate	Response to Question 4			
			Current	Past	Never-Yes	Never-No
Alaska	0	N/A				
American Samoa	0	N/A				
Arizona	13	2.56%	8 (61.5%)	2 (15.4%)	3 (23.1%)	0
California	78	3.13%	22 (28%)	18 (23.1%)	35 (44.9%)	3 (4%)
Colorado	19	3.41%	4 (21.1%)	7 (36.8%)	8 (42.1%)	0
Guam	1	1.29%	1 (100%)	0	0	0
Hawaii	16	14.81%	13 (81.3%)	2 (12.5%)	1 (6.2%)	0
Idaho	50	35.71%	19 (38%)	8 (16%)	20 (40%)	3 (6%)
Micronesia	1	3.03%	1 (100%)	0	0	0
Montana	9	2.21%	7 (77.8%)	1 (11.1%)	0	1 (11.1%)
Nevada	32	12.75%	9 (28.1%)	9 (28.1%)	14 (43.8%)	0
New Mexico	10	30.30%	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	0	0
Northern Mariana Islands	0	N/A				
Oregon	29	4.04%	18 (62.1%)	5 (17.2%)	6 (20.7%)	0
Utah	42	28.00%	18 (42.9%)	3 (7.1%)	15 (35.7%)	6 (14.3%)
Washington	0	N/A				
Wyoming	7	6.42%	3 (42.8%)	0	3 (42.8%)	1 (14.4%)
Western Region	307	5.50%	131	57	105	14

Further, the survey respondents were mapped across the geographic region based on participants' responses to Question 4. To better situate these responses within their geographical context, the potential measure of Native Lands was utilized. These maps were produced in collaboration with Sophia E. Linn at the Geospatial Centroid at Colorado State University and were created with ArcGIS Pro 2.4.1 Service Layers (Credits: Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, EPA, OpenStreetMap contributors and the GIS User Community). Figure 1 shows the current or past collaborations. Next, the respondents that answered that they had never collaborated with indigenous communities and whether or not they would be interested in doing so are represented in Figure 2. Twenty Extension educators from 10 states and one US territory were also interviewed, as displayed in Figure 3, to gain an understanding of their lived experiences. Participants held various kinds of professional positions, had varying levels of administrative power, and were both indigenous and non-indigenous.

Figure 1

Map of Current and Past Collaborations with Native Lands



Figure 2

Map of Never Served: Interested or Not Interested with Native Lands



**Table 2***Number of Interviews by State*

State	Number of Interviews
Alaska	2
Arizona	1
California	3
Colorado	3
Hawaii	1
Idaho	1
Montana	2
Nevada	0
New Mexico	1
Oregon	4
Utah	0
Washington	1
Wyoming	0
Guam	1
American Samoa	0
Northern Marianas	0
Micronesia	0

Participants provided advice for what makes a successful educator. These included being involved with the community, building trusting relationships, having academic and contextual understanding, being willing to learn, and allyship. Many of these components overlapped and amplified each other and would come together to make an educator particularly successful.

**Being involved with the community**

An important characteristic of a successful educator is being involved in the community that they serve. For some, this included sitting on local committees, going to local sporting events, or volunteering. This allowed participants to meet people, build relationships and trust, understand the culture and expectations of the community, and show that they were committed. Six interview participants and 12 (3.9%) survey respondents highlighted this as being important for their success.

Ann became integrated into the indigenous community she serves by attending community events, namely high school sporting events and religious activities:

I had to become part of the community. But I also lived there too. And let me tell you, 25 years ago, before satellite TV and this internet stuff, Friday nights on the rez- high school basketball. I attended every game, every football game, every volleyball game. It showed I took an interest in the community, which eventually led to getting invited to religious activities, to dances and stuff, participating that way as a community member.

Ann was eventually invited to attend Tribal Council meetings at the reservation chapter houses, where she would eventually facilitate her educational programs. This also allowed her to hear what was going on in the community, so that she could plan her programs more effectively.

James, who is from Guam and is Native, explained this point with a funny story of how integrated into the community he is. In response to a question that the Director in Guam asked him, he responded in this way:

Dr. [Name] said, "Where's the weirdest space you've had a workshop?" I said, "When I was in Payless...", which is a supermarket here, "When I was in Payless, from aisle 8 to aisle 11, was the weirdest place I've had a workshop." Because if I meet somebody at the store, I'll be walking, and we'll be talking from aisle 8 to aisle 11. And I've had instances

where my kid will say, “Mom’s in the car, we’re gonna go.” Even though I’m like, “I’ve got to get milk and I’ve got to go home,” I end up talking. I like being able to help somebody, then I know I’ve done my job.

While this story was told with good humor, it illustrates the depth to which James is incorporated into and valued by his community. He also recognizes the importance of this to his work.

For Clay, being involved in his Alaskan community set him apart from other professionals because it gave him credibility. Clay’s community is remote and has social and health issues. Community members are used to people coming in to address these issues, but not staying. Clay explains the importance of becoming part of his community to gain trust and credibility:

In order to communicate effectively, you gotta know your stuff. You gotta be part of the community. You can’t be somebody who visits, but can’t stay. The longer that you spend time, it allows people to listen to you and to hear what you’re saying... That’s the number one piece of advice I have- if you wanna contribute to the community, you gotta be a part of the community. Get a job, buy a house, make some friends, and then you can start interacting with people in a way that they’ll take you seriously.

Clay emphasizes that the way to understand the community and gain credibility is by becoming part of it. He agrees that it is expensive to have him on-sight, but that this is the only way for an educator to be effective.

Survey respondents also talked about being involved with the community as a vital component for their success for many of the reasons already discussed such as gaining trust and learning the community’s needs. An Agent from Hawaii said, “Having good rapport with communities, either a length of time spent that shows you are genuine in your goals to educate and do research on topics these farmers are interested in”, and a 4-H educator from Idaho said, “Having long-term, community-driven programs is key. Brief, unsustainable programs driven by “outsiders” is viewed as interference rather than a solution to problems of poverty, illiteracy, substance abuse, domestic violence”. These perspectives show how important becoming part of the community is, particularly when facing the serious issues that many communities do.

Ultimately, becoming part of the community is something that has been built into the Extension model from its inception; Extension educators have always lived in the communities that they serve. Emily described the importance of this:

Extension coming in, delivering a service, and leaving, and not being members of the community... That doesn’t work as well if we are being honest brokers, and we’re not just in it for our funding or our academic credential, but if we’re really in it for the community... One of the things that makes Extension worthwhile in communities is how much these people live in the community. That’s the beauty of Extension.

Becoming involved, proving that the commitment to the community is long-term, and learning about the community’s needs are all positive outcomes of the Extension model.

### **Building trusting relationships**

Building trusting relationships was the second important major theme for the educators’ success; 19 of the 20 interview participants discussed how they have built trusting relationships with community members. This gives them insight and access into the community that they wouldn’t otherwise have, allowing them to better serve the community. Margaret explained it simply, “I would say that the key to success is really developing relationships. And how do you do that? It’s by being visible. It’s by being transparent. It’s by constant communication”. In addition to the interview participants, 69 (22.5%) of the survey respondents also identified relationship building as a necessary component to successful collaborations. They talked about collaborations in research, programs such

as 4-H, and funding opportunities being benefited by trusting relationships. For example, an Advisor from California said, "As with any clientele group, a preexisting relationship is essential. I believe that my connections now will facilitate research and educational partnerships moving forward".

Interview participants talked about how they go about building relationships. When Danielle first started her specialist position, she traveled to every reservation in her state during her first summer to make connections and meet people:

The more face time you have, you can build so much more trust, rapport, and get things done. It's really important to show up and be there, but also stay a few extra days and go to community events and go places when you're invited. I've learned so much, and that's helped shape good relationships.

Similar to Danielle's response, Diane also explained that building relationships can't be rushed:

I've found that I need to work with a group of people who don't look like me, or I don't look like them, for about three years before they accept that I'm not going anywhere, that I am listening to them, and that my actions are impacted by what they say.

Again, we hear the concern from indigenous communities that Outsiders will come in, but not stay. Diane utilizes relationship building to reassure members of the community that she is there to listen to them. Listening was a common theme among participants, as we see below.

Kent has also had the experience of building relationships by listening and getting to the point where members of the community call him to be involved in projects:

You have to listen, listen, listen, listen. You have to just keep working away and eventually you'll build the relations up to where they're a lot more open, to where they'll call you and ask you questions. But for the first part, for 10 years, I do face-to-face. I drive out there, meet with them, sit across the council, and talk with the Chairman and that's important.

This kind of relationship has taken Kent 20 years, in some cases, to build. By putting in the effort, he can be more accessible and responsive to the community's needs.

Even when an Extension employee isn't an outsider, listening is still important to be able to teach community members. James, emphasized the importance of listening in relation to being a good teacher:

I think of the professionals that I've had. Damn, they were smart, but some of them were lousy teachers. The person I want in the field, I want them to be smart, but I want them to be a good teacher. If you can't listen and then talk, there's a problem. Getting a good Extension person in an indigenous area is hard. Getting a good Extension person who can listen, that is by far the number one thing.

These are traits that James uses when working with indigenous farmers in Guam, people that he and his family have strong ties to.

Julie and Amelia, who are both from the same state, safeguard the relationship that they have with the reservation they serve because, in their experience, there are a lot of organizations that want to partner with Extension to do programming, but they don't always do it in culturally appropriate ways. Julie said:

We learned to be pretty protective. There's a history of different entities coming in with a grant, saying they're going to do something and not doing it, which goes back to a lot of

the historical trauma with Europeans saying they're going to do something, not doing it or doing something completely different.

Even though an external organization might have funding to work with tribal communities, risking the relationship that she has built with them is not worth it. Amelia also talked about external organizations wanting to write grants for the community, and how this rarely impacts the community in a meaningful way:

They want to provide grants, but they want to write it. They want, they want, they want, and it never pans out to where [Reservation] gets anything. They maybe have professionals doing a couple of workshops, but they're strangers in the community, so people don't attend. Why should they trust them? They're lied to half the time, or they're not taken seriously. I believe people have great intentions wanting to help, they just don't understand that they have to go about it in a different way.

That "different way" is building trusting relationships, making sure the programs benefit the community, are sustainable, and respecting tribal sovereignty.

### **Academic and contextual understanding**

Most of the participants in both the survey and interviews showed a deep academic and contextual understanding of many issues facing their communities, from general diversity and inclusion issues to the specific socio-cultural environment of their community, to settler colonialist culture and its implications today. Twelve interview participants either displayed academic knowledge that was important for their work or directly named this a part of their success. This academic and contextual understanding helped them to navigate their context, make professional decisions, and to connect to people, while putting many of the issues they were seeing in their social, cultural, or historical context.

Some interview participants expressed a passion for equity issues in general through their interviews, and often applied that to their work in Extension. Diane, a STEM Specialist, understands that, "science is a diversity issue", and this understanding influences how she frames her work. Many participants also showed a cultural and historical understanding of the specific tribes that they were serving. This allowed them to not only understand their context better, but also incorporate the specific culture of their communities into their educational programs. Jack directly addressed this, "Many tribes will literally put their tribal history on the front page of their website. It's not hard to figure it out... Just understanding who these people are that you're working with, and why they are who they are". Other participants made similar comments about topics like the history of traditional agricultural practices on the land, the history of the relationship between the university and the tribes, and an understanding of the tribal cultures themselves. They were also able to connect this understanding to their work as educators.

Perhaps most impactful, some participants discussed their understanding of settler colonialism, and how this history and culture continues to impact indigenous communities today. Jeff has gone out of his way to gain an understanding of the history of settler colonialism and values that knowledge in his work. He connects this and contextual directly to the systemic inequities that indigenous communities experience now:

That sense of history, I found to be different from the Western academic perspective. Part of it is more immediate socio-cultural history, just going back a generation or two. Some of it is immediate, many of our tribal communities are amongst the most impoverished and underserved in our country. If you don't have a sense for what that is and how long it has persisted and how it came to be, you're at a disadvantage trying to work in those communities.

Randall encompasses many of the components that make an educator successful, including academic and contextual understanding of racism and colonialism given his specific context. This helps

him explain what he sees in the community he serves, and to form a deeper connection to them. For example, Randall describes how he conceptualizes the violence he has witnessed on the reservation:

Drugs, alcohol, violence... [The Capital of the Reservation] was once called the murder capital of the US because the per capita murder rate was higher than any place in the country. You know why? Because Native Americans are inherently violent? No! The environment, the conditions. Grown up with abuse that they've suffered, their culture being torn away from them. We need to understand the situations that Native people live in, their history, the betrayal and deceit and lies.

Randall uses these examples to show how indigenous peoples have suffered, but importantly, the suffering is the result of the "betrayal and deceit" that indigenous peoples experienced at the hand of the White colonists. Randall sees the effects of settler colonialist culture in the violence on the reservation, and this academic and contextual understanding helps him understand it.

### **Being willing to learn**

Half of the educators interviewed expressed a willingness to learn about the community, themselves, and from their own mistakes. This learning could be about the particular tribe(s) they were serving, the needs of their community, or about the histories and cultures of indigenous peoples. Also, being willing to learn about one's identity is important to this work as well.

It was often someone that the educator had developed a close relationship with from the community that was able to educate them about working in the community. Diane told a story about a lesson she learned from the Education Director at her reservation, with whom Diane had developed a trusting relationship with over many years:

I have taught dissection classes to kids. I mentioned that to her, and she said, "Oh no, we couldn't do that here. There's some [members of the tribe] that don't have that problem, but the traditional [members of the tribe] would." I said, "I've found that when I teach this class, kids walk away with more respect for life." She said, "But that's in a different culture. I know that about you, but here we can't do it, because I would consider it disrespectful to do that to an animal." She's great because I can say these stupid things and she'll correct me kindly.

Despite dissections being a common practice in science classrooms in other cultures, Diane was open to hearing from her collaborator that this was not an appropriate lesson in this context.

A few participants discussed the importance of learning about oneself and how their identities impact their work in indigenous communities. Some discussed the impact of being White or being Native, but a few connected this to their willingness to learn and reflect on their identities. For example, Julie had experience with an Extension educator that experienced difficulties connecting his identity with his work. When issues about "the White man" would come up, "he took those personally and he couldn't separate himself from it." Ultimately, he was not successful working in this environment. Amelia was another notable example. She identifies as 'of tribal descent', she lived and went to school on the reservation for some of her childhood, and values that part of her heritage, but she also feels that she presents as White and understands that she has privileges because of that, "I'm aware of my White privilege a whole hell of a lot, and I am also Native American and I'm totally aware of my White privilege". Amelia is conscious of her intersecting identities and how she presents impacts her work with tribes.

Often, this willingness to learn was in contrast to the culture of academia and how faculty are used to "being the expert", relying on the "best available science", and telling people, "This is what you should be doing", all summarized by Jeff. Many agreed that this is not the most effective way to approach indigenous communities and that being willing to learn is important. Jeff continues, "That earnest curiosity coming into a community and saying, 'I know that I don't know enough about this

place and your people. Can you help me? Can you teach me?" Julie also talked about the culture of expertise in academia and how the approach an Extension employee should take in tribal communities is different than in other places; she emphasizes the importance of being willing to learn, "A lot of Extension is trained to say, 'Here's the answer,' rather than being the liaison between the research and the real world when the realistic answer should be, 'That's a really great question, let me find out for you.'" Lastly, Margaret also talked about the culture of academia and how a willingness to learn should come first:

It's important to enter as a guest, be willing to learn, and be willing to partner. It means being able to listen to some difficult things. There's history between institutions of higher education and tribal communities, and sometimes it hasn't been the best. Institutions of higher education need to be okay with hearing that, but not okay with continuing with business as usual.

She also included the historic tension between universities and tribes as something that educators need to be willing to learn about, connect to, and overcome in order to listen to the needs of the community effectively.

### **Allyship**

While these participants would probably consider themselves allies of indigenous peoples, there were two interview participants that explicitly discussed the topic: Randall, who identifies as White, and Carrie, who identifies as Native. While Randall acknowledges that he is separated from indigenous peoples because of his race, he feels a strong connection, "I'm an ally to the Native American community, even though I don't have any Native blood in me. I feel very connected". Randall talked about how important he thinks it is to bring this connection that he feels to the people he is serving. Randall discussed how a feeling of compassion is important when serving any marginalized community:

Especially when you are trying to engage a marginalized community, you have to have that compassion. You have to have that identification with the people you're serving... I feel a deep connection to Native Americans, and I can't explain it. That has to be cultivated, it has to be developed with one-on-one connections where you need to be exposed to the people.

Randall advocates for community connection and relationship building for Extension educators to become better allies.

Carrie is a FRTEP Agent living on the reservation she serves. She is Native and has lived in Native communities most of her life. She has prioritized the concept of allyship in her educational programming with Native youth. For example, she took a group of students to a leadership conference where they gave a presentation about tribal government:

I was like, "You're probably wondering why we're doing a thing on tribal government, how it applies to me. You guys are surrounded by Indians! And we're your partners. We're your allies. Same things that you guys are challenged with- land use, with environmental research, with climate change... This is why you need to work together. You guys forget that we're still here. You know, you forget that we're here, and we're still here."

These overlapping goals unite people and provide a basis for allyship and collaboration. Carrie has some advice for people hoping to be allies with indigenous peoples:

Walking alongside them, and being partners, and letting them take the lead, you know? ... It's more important to be an ally and a partner than it is to be a leader, because what our ultimate goal should be, whether we're tribal or non-tribal, is fostering this ownership and leadership. That's what we need to work ourselves out of a job, and have our Native youth take over these jobs. So, I guess just keeping that in mind. You're an ally, you're a partner.

Carrie prioritizes the importance of working with Native youth and highlights common goals. She also makes a distinction between being an ally and being a leader, encouraging people to walk alongside Native youth and letting them take the lead.

### Discussion

Participants highlighted many important qualities for a successful educator, and gave insights based on this research. Given the commitment to a decolonizing methodology and the prioritization of incorporating participants' voice throughout the research process, I have included their perspectives, suggestions, and quotes in this section. Both survey and interview participants advocated for training and professional development opportunities, especially given the importance of academic and contextual understanding and having a willingness to learn. Julie said, "The training, getting that background into what it means to be working with tribes, what that history looks like, especially in individual communities". Amelia also explicitly advocated for educators to learn about their identities and how they show up in their work:

People need more diversity trainings, and they need to learn about their own diversity, cause that's the only way you're going to help other people. You understand where you're coming from and your bias and know how you're seeing something. That goes a long way to building that relationship. When you're like, "I don't know this, but if you think that it would be great for me to learn, I am eager and happy to learn."

Amelia connects the ideas about the importance of diversity training and understanding one's own identity to a willingness to learn and how that improves relationships with indigenous communities. These trainings could be delivered through Extension or a university's professional development programs, or from the communities themselves.

One area that Extension could provide training in could be the concept of allyship, which was prevalent in participants' responses. This can be a challenging endeavor and would require a commitment from both Extension administration and educators themselves. Understanding the way that the participants viewed their allyship might inform how to create educational opportunities. Randall, for example, was adept at identifying with the "Other" (Omi & Winant, 2015), Carrie found shared priorities, and Amelia examined her own identities and how they impact her work. Also, Extension could cultivate some of the other characteristics of successful educators in their institutional culture to help make this shift. This culture shift will ensure that the lessons remain long-lasting and produce change from within, with the understanding that the work of solidarity is on-going, institutionally and personally.

#### Definition of "success"

One of the outcomes of this work was how educators define "success" and how that implicitly or explicitly conflicts with how Extension traditionally measures "success". For example, participants said that they are evaluated on metrics such as publications, participation numbers, and grant dollars. These are traditional measures of success in Western academic environments, but they are often at odds with working in marginalized communities. This work takes additional time and expertise, there may be fewer participants, and funding is scarce. Jack explained these issues:

It would be nice to see that our merit and promotion system can accommodate working with the slow grind of learning these tools. It takes a while to be able to figure out how to do this, and there's not anyone teaching these types of things. Some sort of acknowledgement that working with tribes can be slow and you're not going to get a lot of those traditional items on your promotion package upfront.

Dave has also experienced these frustrations, but has put the needs of his community first, at possible expense to his career:

You get the result that you incentivize. If you are incentivizing outreach in the community, then you're gonna get a lot of that. If you're expecting publications and impact factors, then that's what you're gonna get. I've just ignored what the expectation is for my position and hope that I don't get fired.

While the traditional measures of success might look different than when Extension is serving other communities, the impacts in indigenous communities are no less important. Understanding these differences and being able to evaluate educators with them in mind is important to supporting this work. Educators need to be supported by the culture within Extension and be able to create successful careers while cultivating these collaborations.

Research into the lived experiences of Extension Educators in indigenous communities is limited, and this research was limited to the perspectives of 1862 professionals in one region of Extension. Future research needs to be done to understand the perspectives of educators at 1994 Tribal Colleges and community members that interact with Extension programming. Additionally, there may be regional differences based on community history and needs, the way Extension is administered and funded, and whether underserved communities are prioritized. These should all be investigated to better equip educators to be successful in their specific communities.

Indigenous communities and the personnel that serve them have been largely forgotten within Extension's work and research. These programs are underfunded, underrepresented (Brewer et al., 2016), and there is not a systemic system that supports them. This study explored the characteristics that make educators successful including being involved with the community, building trusting relationships, having academic and contextual understanding, being willing to learn, and cultivating allyship. Understanding the lived experiences of Extension personnel in the field and the indigenous communities that they serve will inform practice and policy within Extension, aimed at providing equitable access to the benefits of this system. Only then will the entire Land Grant Mission truly be fulfilled.

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