

## Effective Service Delivery for Indigenous Children and Youth

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) supports equal access to education and mental health services for Indigenous children and youth, and recognizes that their families are partners in the provision of these services. NASP recognizes the “Indigenous Conceptual Framework Guiding School Psychology Practice With Indigenous Youth, Families, and Communities” developed by the NASP workgroup as a foundation and guide in providing equal access. The Framework is designed to guide culturally responsive service delivery and improve the quality of policy and practice.

An estimated 4.4 million American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people live in the United States. They are citizens of the United States, and many also are citizens of the tribal nations to which they belong (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Legally and politically, 561 tribes are recognized as sovereign nations by the U.S. government. An estimated 209 Indigenous languages are spoken in North America today. The term Indigenous means “first people of the land;” this is used as an inclusive term that describes common roots and cultural and spiritual bonds among Native Hawaiians, Alaskan Natives, and Indians (Dauphinais, Charley, Robinson-Zañartu, Melroe, & Baas, 2009).

The percentages of Indigenous youth who still remain overrepresented or misidentified with special education needs and are underserved in general education remains unacceptably high across the nation. Indigenous youth leave school early at rates far higher than other groups (Stillwell, 2010), complete higher education at far lower rates, and attend class with teachers who understand far less about them in general than other students (Starnes, 2006). Many leave school or are pushed out long before dropout rates are calculated, frequently at Grade 7. This results in significant underrepresentation of true numbers in nationally reported dropout figures for Indigenous youth. Even given that reality, national figures report that only 64% of Indigenous youth complete high school (Stillwell, 2010).

### **BARRIERS TO FULL ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION**

Significant barriers impede Indigenous children from seeking and completing an education and, thus, their successful entry into the world of work. These barriers reverberate throughout the lives of Indigenous children and, at times, recycle to their children and across generations. School psychologists must become aware of the barriers unique to Indigenous children, youth, and families. Families who live in poverty and unsupportive communities compound the negative effects of these barriers.

### **LEGACY OF TRAUMA**

Historical trauma, also known as intergenerational trauma, is a cumulative emotional and psychological wounding whose effects continue to be experienced individually (and by entire communities) over the lifespan and across generations (Brave Heart, 2003; Duran & Duran, 1995). The traumatic histories of tribal people engendered loss of language, spiritual and cultural practices, and ways of thinking. This

loss of cultural roots plays one of the most significant negative roles, and has led to lasting negative influences on many Indigenous youth. Indigenous youth exhibit unacceptably high rates of mental health problems, school dropout, suicide, learning problems, and rates of health problems related to drinking and drug use (Beauvais, Jumper-Thurman, & Burnside, 2008).

Indian boarding schools played a key role in the historical trauma we see today. Established by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the late 1880s, and operating well into the 20th century, boarding schools initiated the harsh process of assimilation. Children were taken from their families and homelands to be indoctrinated into Western thought and stripped of home, culture, language, livelihood, traditional dress, and parental contact. Indigenous identity was suppressed through corporal punishment, which has been cited as a source of internalized oppression and resulting underachievement as well as multiple distresses and dysfunctions. (Dauphinais et al., 2009).

The role of Western education in the dismantling of a nation and culture cannot be ignored. Native nations have begun the process of healing by working through traditional methods that validate their experience of historical trauma. The tribes have also begun to rejuvenate cultural and language traditions that provide for the strengthening of youth's Indigenous identity. It is critical that educators be aware of Indigenous nations' responses to the past, become familiar with their cultural perspectives, and consider remnants of past practices or experiences that continue to influence the institution of education today.

Despite the effort devoted to assimilation and to the extinction of Indigenous cultures, most tribal nations continue to practice and fight for sovereignty and the right to manage their land and national resources. They have sustained their cultural identity by speaking their languages and continuing their spiritual beliefs and practices. By engaging in the cultural healing process, Indigenous people empower themselves to live as survivors, rather than as victims. We have come to learn that for many resilient Indigenous youth, their strength is the result of reciprocity between cultures (Indigenous and Western); they become the blossom of roots that lie in a variety of soils. NASP recognizes that school psychologists can play a key role in fostering this resiliency.

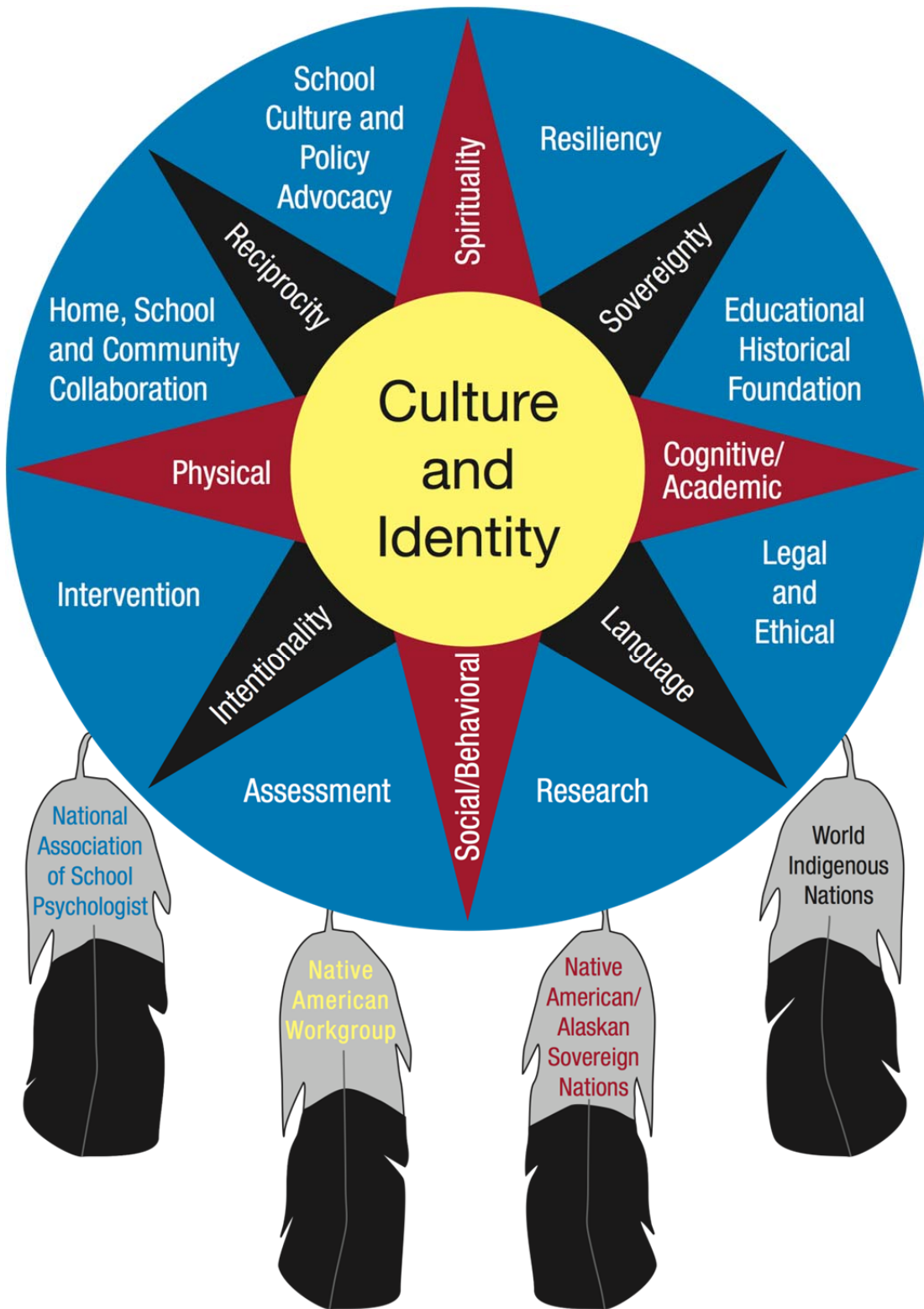
## **RESPONSIVE PRACTICE WITH INDIGENOUS YOUTH**

Figure 1 provides a conceptual framework to support the efforts of school psychologists to meet the needs of Indigenous youth.

The NASP Practice Model recognizes diversity and development in learning as one of its foundations (NASP, 2010). The above "Indigenous Conceptual Framework Guiding School Psychology Practice With Indigenous Youth, Families, and Communities" recognizes culture and identity as its core. This core serves as a symbol of the source of energy that feeds the growth of spirituality, cognitive–academic, social–emotional–behavioral, and physical development of Indigenous children, as well as of the practitioner. The eight points of the center star include the key ideas and practices needed to support Indigenous youth.

- **Sovereignty.** As an issue of sovereignty, the Constitution, treaties, and laws of the United States entitle federal trust obligation to Native education (NIEA Legislative Agenda, 2012). Indigenous communities have the right to revitalize culture and language through self-sufficiency and self-governance.

**Figure 1. An Indigenous Conceptual Framework: Guiding School Psychology Practice With Indigenous Youth, Families, and Communities**



- **Language.** Language is a culture carrier and thus is critical to identity. Some tribes face extinction of their languages, which endangers their identities. Youth regaining their Indigenous languages may know songs, phrases, and prayers or stories in their original languages. Others may be fully bilingual. NASP understands language revitalization efforts as key role in maintaining Indigenous identity.
- **Intentionality.** To be most effective in Indigenous communities, school psychologists must come with the intention to support the development and resilience of the Indigenous youth, which grows out of identity and culture. Given that intent, school psychologists must practice in a way congruent with the academic, behavioral, and social success of their Indigenous students.
- **Reciprocity.** An effective school psychologist working with Indigenous youth, families, and communities builds genuine reciprocity. This includes partnering with the community and parents as well as understanding and learning the culture by building two-way or reciprocal relationships that facilitate trust and the development of respect (Baez, 2011). For example, in most Indigenous cultures, adults are expected to model rather than demand respect. Thus, in schools, culturally responsive educators will model respect that fosters reciprocal relationships.
- **Spiritual.** It is important that school psychologists understand Indigenous philosophies of interrelatedness and respect for all living things. Create a sacred space in the schools where Indigenous students feel safe to learn and share thoughts and concerns by validating cultural identity and knowledge.
- **Cognitive–academic.** It is important to access prior background knowledge of academic and language skills. Consider culturally embedded knowledge of thinking and problem-solving skills (Tso, 2010), as well as culturally based content when developing interventions and assessing cognitive skills and academic performance. In assessment practices, conventional measures of verbal ability are likely not to be valid for many or most Indigenous students due to a variety of issues ranging from lack of proficiency in either English or in their native language and lack of exposure to the language and concepts being assessed (Dauphinais & King, 1992).
- **Social–emotional–behavioral.** Affirm resiliency amongst Indigenous youth and communities and validate traditional models of healing (e.g., medicine wheel) through spiritual or experiential means. Understand that Indigenous communities are in the process of recovery from historical intergenerational trauma and that environmental and ecosystemic factors need to be considered to avoid pitfalls of misdiagnosis. Collaborate with community agencies and use traditional healing practices in intervention.
- **Physical.** Provide culturally appropriate prevention and intervention. Address self-destructive behaviors such as cutting, burning, and abuse of alcohol and drugs. Recognize the impact of domestic violence on behavior. Address health issues and support education to address concerns such as obesity and diabetes. Reincorporate ancestral foods and Indigenous games into school health and wellness routines. Promote a balanced lifestyle, which reflects the interrelationships of the spiritual, mental, social, and physical wellness.

## ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

School psychologists need to be aware of their own cultural perspectives, so they do not inadvertently impose their worldviews or biases when working with Indigenous communities. In culturally responsive practice, the school psychologist supports opportunities for Indigenous children to access their own cultures. Whether school psychologists are serving Indigenous students on or off the reservation, in rural or urban settings, they need to consider the elements in the Conceptual Framework. By doing so,

NASP's core value of *diversity in development and learning* is expressed through acknowledgement of the process of recovery of Indigenous peoples from historical trauma. This also promotes understanding of their unique legal and political status as sovereign nations with innate languages and traditional knowledge bases for healing and recovery. School psychologists work from authentic and intentional support of Indigenous identities and build positive, trusting, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous children, families, and communities.

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