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Indigenous Practices in Head Start Classrooms— Toward Survivance and Indigenization in Policy and Practice

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By

Liza Xet Smith

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Ki'y matiox nan. Ki'y matiox tat. Ki'y matiox ati't mami'aj. Ki'y matiox iximulew.

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This dissertation is a commitment to the work. I am accountable to the past, present, and future Indigenous scholars who have provided discourse, historical knowledge, and expertise. As Leigh Patel wrote in *Weaving an Otherwise*, "So let's get into it, not onward or forward, but toward" (xiii, 2022).

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous Practices in Head Start Classrooms—

Toward Survivance and Indigenization in Policy and Practice

by

Liza Xet Smith

The Office of Head Start has prioritized holistic quality education services for children and communities in greatest need. First, since 1965, the federal government has funded, regulated, and publicly aided over 38 million children through Head Start programming, including AIAN and Migrant programs (Administration for Children and Families, n.d.). In 2019, over $10 billion was budgeted for the program, resulting in 1,047,000 low-income children and their families receiving services (Office of Head Start, 2022a). In addition, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation has funded research to improve quality and child outcomes, with research recommendations that significantly guide state and local early childhood policy (Kooragayala, 2019). The Office of Head Start noted programming should be shaped based on research that meets Head Start's definition of "principles of scientific research" necessary to be considered for policy (Head Start Act, 2007, Sec 637). Lastly, updated in 2023, the multicultural principles have served as a resource to improve programming and service delivery for children and families. Unlike the Head Start performance standards, the multicultural principles are not attached to funding or performance reviews. Still, they are instead considered best practices for the programs. These principles do not do enough to support Indigenous pedagogy outside of tribal reservations (Administration for Children and Families, 2010).

The Office of Head Start can recognize the potential and necessity for Indigenization in Head Start by amplifying the voices of Indigenous teachers already weaving and making their way into classrooms. The disconnect between research, policy, and the lived experiences of Indigenous teachers can only be bridged through meaningful collaboration and acknowledgment of the unique ways of knowing and teaching that Indigenous educators bring to Head Start spaces. Through Survivance, Indigenous teachers continue to reclaim what colonization has attempted to erase. The journey toward Indigenization and Survivance must be guided by an understanding of Indigenous practices' holistic and sacred nature, creating spaces honoring diversity and defying the limitations of a Eurocentric education system.

CHAPTER 1

THE SOURCE OF MY ORIGIN

Maybe you're not a language keeper

Maybe you're not a language keeper,
But know the songs.

Maybe you're not a basket weaver,
But know the roots.

Maybe you don't keep the medicines,
But you keep the children.

Maybe you're not a dancer,
But you make the regalia.

Maybe you don't keep a lodge,
But you keep the fire.

We don't need to be all of the things
To be Indigenous
To be worthy
To be valued
To belong.

We had societies and our
Roles were specific to our gifts.
Quit exhausting your Spirit
Trying to be gifted at everything.
It doesn't make you more Traditional.

(Mercredi-Fleming, P., n.d.)

I began my research by defining my Indigenous learning and knowing, by acknowledging my Indigeneity is enough, and by knowing it has become a part of my educator identity. The Indigenous research journey began with establishing relational accountability. Relational accountability was about forming a respectful relationship with the ideas I was studying and the

reader forming a relationship with me as researcher (Wilson, 2008). This meant understanding the journey that led me to this topic, where the topic fit into my life, and the factors influencing my point of view.

I am a Mayan descendant of the Kaqchikel group from Guatemala where our family still weave birds and suns into *cinchos* and *huipiles*. In addition to being Indigenous, I approached this study as an expert and practitioner in early childhood education. My role in Head Start began in 2007 as a preschool teacher, and I have dedicated my career to serving all children and families. The relationships I have developed as an early childhood educator have given me deep knowledge of curriculum, policy, and practice, and have become a part of my educator identity. I am a wife, mother, friend, community member, teacher, and researcher. These experiences have been like threads weaving an ever so intricate pattern of my life's *huipil*. I intricately wove my Indigenous pedagogy and ways of knowing into this educational research.

Teaching and knowing are important constructs in the field of education. Teaching refers to the process of providing instruction and guidance to learners. Knowing refers to the acquisition and application of knowledge. These constructs are closely related and essential to all learners' education. Indigenous teaching and knowing are similarly closely related. As Indigenous communities have faced erasure at the hands of colonization, so have Indigenous pedagogies in education. However, Indigenous peoples and communities are still evident, connected, and visible. The role of the Indigenous educator in colonized spaces in the formative years of early childhood education may have a more significant impact yet to be fully measured.

At the outset, it was essential to clarify and define the meaning and use of "Indigenous" throughout this work. The Indigenous people of the globe are a highly diversified and legitimate

group. There is no universal definition of Indigeneity, but there are agreed-upon norms. Wilson (2008) explained, “Indigenous is inclusive of all first peoples—unique in our own cultures . . . but common in our experiences of colonialism and our understanding of the world” (p. 16). The modern understanding of Indigenous groups is based upon the following standards established by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (n.d.):

- Self-identification as Indigenous peoples at the individual level and acceptance by the community as their member,
- Historical continuity with precolonial and/or presettler societies,
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources,
- Distinct social, economic, or political systems,
- Distinct language, culture, and beliefs,
- Form non-dominant groups of society, and
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities. (p. 1)

In addition to the definition, a large part of the quantitative data from the United States for Indigenous and native groups are derived from studies observing the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) description. The U.S. Census defined American Indian and Alaskan Native as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment” (U.S. Office of Management and Budget [OMB], 1997, para. 93). This definition may seem all-encompassing of the diaspora of Indigenous people, but the data are often used to solely create policy for Native Americans residing in the United States. In addition, although the

United States has offered an official procedure for tribal enrollment, this procedure requires genealogical research and documented ancestry (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2021). These procedural requirements serve as gatekeepers on the federal level, and fulfilling the tribal enrollment process may be inaccessible to most in this category.

Despite the continued colonization of the Indigenous in the United States, there has been increased social awareness of the Indigenous journey and story to the non-Indigenous society. Nationally, President Biden proclaimed October 11, 2021 as Indigenous People's Day to "honor America's first inhabitants and the Tribal Nations that continue to thrive today" (Biden, 2021, p. 1). Mainstream media and exposure have also increased, partly due to the distinct Indigenous way of viewing the world and "being" (Wilson, 2008, p. 15). *Reservation Dogs*, a show about Native American youth and their experiences, has been critically acclaimed and award-winning (Jacobs, 2023). Indigenous influencers across various social media spaces have used their platforms to create allies and advocate for their rights (Sehra, 2021). Through land acknowledgments and "land back" shouts, Native Peoples have been recognized as original caretakers and should be respected as vibrantly living today (Native Governance Center, 2019).

Simultaneously, the awakening of the importance of the early childhood journey has also been on the rise. The United States has started to confront its educational shortcomings and focus on academic achievement for all, starting with 4-year-olds. The focus on curriculum and "best practice" has reached even the youngest learners nationwide. In 2019, over $10 billion was budgeted for Head Start, which provides early care services to over 1,047,000 low-income children and their families (Office of Head Start, 2022a). Although Head Start serves just a percentage of the millions of children under 5 years old in the nation, data collection and

research have significantly guided state and local early childhood programs and policies (Kooragayala, 2019). In 2021, President Biden presented the creation of universal preschool to Congress under his *Build Back Better Act* (U.S. House of Representatives, 2021). Universal preschool assures "services would be universally available to all children in the state and be high quality, free, inclusive, and offered for at least 1,020 hours annually" (Lynch, 2021, p. 3). Although the Act did not pass, government-funded universal preschool has reached a national audience.

Fundamentally, increased mainstream recognition of marginalized populations, including Indigenous and early childhood education, has widened their reach and raised awareness of how they are studied. This chapter begins with an overview of early childhood education, specifically Head Start, and its relationship with Indigenous education in the United States. Next, the chapter presents the problem, purpose, and research questions guiding this study and the study's theoretical framework—Indigenous standpoint theory. Finally, the chapter provides the methodology and research design for the study.

Statement of the Problem

According to Mapping Indigenous LA (2020), a nonprofit organization mapping multiple layers of Indigenous records, "When we consider Pacific Islanders and Latin American Indigenous Diasporas, Los Angeles has the largest Indigenous population of any city in the [United States]" (para. 1). Although the Indigenous people has continued to survive in the United States in spite of colonization, Head Start agencies have historically been viewed as culturally indoctrinated federally funded programming in the most vulnerable years by Indigenous scholars (Romero-Little, 2010). The Office of Head Start has served as an ever-increasing Indigenous

population (Fabre et al., 2023). Yet, there has been little to no emphasis on "preserving, revitalizing, restoring, or maintaining" the Indigenous experience outside of Tribal Reservations (Administration for Children and Families, 2015, para. 8; Romero-Little, 2010).

To support equitable classrooms, The Office of Head Start approved guiding multicultural principles for all programs, including American Indian and Alaskan Native (AIAN) and migrant programs, to reference (Administration for Children and Families, 2024). The office released the research literature in 1991 and then updated them in 2008 because "in a time of rapid demographic changes across the nation, the service areas of Head Start and Early Head Start programs are more racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse than ever before" (Administration for Children and Families, 2010, para. 3). The multicultural principles, updated again in 2023, have served as a resource to improve programming and service delivery for children and families (Administration for Children and Families, 2024). Unlike the Head Start performance standards that require programs to demonstrate their respect for and respond to all the different cultures in their service area, the principles recognize program staff and administrators are rooted in their own culture and therefore play a fundamental role in the systems and services. The principles are not attached to funding or performance reviews but are instead considered best practices for the programs. These principles do not do enough to support Indigenous pedagogy outside of tribal reservations (Administration for Children and Families, 2010).

Indigenous practices have been defined in previous academic research and have demonstrated a particular deviation from the standardized curriculum often found in Head Start classrooms in Los Angeles (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015). Indigenous practices are

culturally safe and trauma- and violence-informed (Wright et al., 2019). In addition, Indigenous pedagogies have been studied to be primarily relational, relying heavily on storytelling, observations, and the use of nature as a teacher (Peterson et al., 2019).

Pacini-Ketchabaw and Taylor (2015) reviewed classrooms across Australia, Canada, and the United States with significant work toward undoing tragedies and providing reparations to countless Indigenous and Native citizens. Pacini-Ketchabaw and Taylor (2015) noted:

> Knowingly or not, early childhood education's stock-in-trade scientific theories about the "natural" development of the assumed-to-be universal child are part of a much larger Western epistemological project to "lead the world forward." With this bigger picture in mind, our efforts to unsettle early childhood education beginning with the understanding that the field of early childhood education is neither culturally neutral nor politically innocent. (p. 2)

Existing policies have failed to acknowledge the Indigenous experience of children and their families enrolled in non-AIAN Head Start and have not explicitly supported this community. The dominance of Eurocentric and Westernized practices may silence programs, policies, experiences, and interactions reflecting and supporting Indigenous staff, parents, and children.

Purpose of the Study

The present study shed light on a critical gap in early childhood education concerning documenting the lived experiences of self-identified Indigenous teachers working in Head Start classrooms within colonized spaces. Historically, these voices and journeys have been silenced and marginalized in academic discourses, and their perspectives have yet to be effectively incorporated into classroom policy. Furthermore, existing narratives surrounding teacher identity

and experiences have been constructed typically within a Eurocentric and Westernized framework, thereby erasing the unique cultural and historical contexts that shape Indigenous teachers' beliefs and practices.

Against this backdrop, this research investigated Indigenous teachers' self-identified roles and beliefs in the context of their teaching practices. Using an Indigenous lens, the study examined how these teachers conceptualized their identities and the extent to which their beliefs about teaching and learning and pedagogical practices were informed by their Indigenous teacher identity.

The study used a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of self-identified Indigenous teachers in non-AIAN Head Start programs. The studied region was a large metropolitan county with a notable presence of Indigenous children and families. Data were collected through three-part semistructured in-depth interviews and a collection of artifacts focused on the Indigenous experience, perception, and understanding in Head Start classrooms. By foregrounding Indigenous perspectives in this way, the study sought to affect policy and praxis in the future, ultimately leading to more equitable and effective educational outcomes for all families, particularly Indigenous families, in Head Start programs.

Significance of the Study

Numerous scholars have contended Indigenous research has been constrained and often devoid of outcomes and recommendations directly serving Indigenous teachers, students, and their families (Battiste, 2002; Marks et al., 2003; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Romero-Little, 2010). Past research in Head Start classrooms has been leveraged to shape program policy when it aligns with the "principles of scientific research" (Head Start Act, 2007, Sec 637), but

little is known about the contemporary experiences of Indigenous teachers in the Head Start program.

The potential significance of this study lies in the expectation its knowledge base offers insights into how Head Start policy and practice can better support the work of Indigenous teachers. The voices of self-identified Indigenous teachers hold immense power, and this foundational knowledge has the potential to enhance support for marginalized communities. Moreover, Head Start represents an opportunity to fulfill its promise of multicultural and social justice principles. This matters because it impacts students, educators, and the collective generations of indigenous populations living in Los Angeles.

Research Question

The exploratory study examined the perceptions and lived experiences of Indigenous teachers who narrate their perspectives on the ways Indigenous identity informs pedagogical practices in non-AIAN classrooms. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. How do Indigenous teachers describe, experience, and make meaning of the educational pedagogy in Head Start spaces in the Southern California regions?
2. How can Indigenous teachers' ways of knowing and being inform Head Start educational practices and policies?

Theoretical Framework

Indigenous standpoint theory (IST) is a theoretical framework that highlights the importance of Indigenous peoples' unique perspectives, knowledge, and social and political experiences in understanding the world (Foley, 2003). IST posits Indigenous peoples' experiences of colonization, discrimination, and oppression have led to the development of

distinctive ways of knowing, being, and relating to the world. These ways of knowing are grounded in Indigenous cultural practices, languages, and worldviews, and are characterized by a deep connection to land, community, and spirituality. It is more than a mere recounting of stories. Nakata (2007a) wrote:

> It is not a simple reflection of experience, and it does not preexist in the everyday waiting to be brought to light. It is not any sort of hidden wisdom that Indigenous people possess. It is a distinct form of analysis and is itself both a discursive construction and an intellectual device to persuade others and elevate what might not have been a focus of attention by others. (p. 11)

This method of inquiry emphasizes the importance of Indigenous peoples' perspectives, knowledge, and social experiences in understanding the world (Foley, 2003). Smith (2021) wrote IST is "at its core, an activity of hope" (p. 258).

Finally, I chose IST as a political act to research ourselves back to life rather than to extract precious knowledge, only to never reap the wealth again (Kovach, 2018). The intent is to provide a venue and platform to co-create a world where we can thrive. I am to give testimony and document the spirit of the Indigenous community (Foley, 2003). I am the weaver, and the teachers are the thread.

Limitations/Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations can affect the results and interpretation of a qualitative study. Limitations refer to factors outside the researcher's control and may impact the study's validity or reliability. There were at least three potential limitations concerning the possible results of this study. The first limitation involved teachers' self-identification of indigeneity.

These self-identifiers varied and limited generalizability. A second potential limitation was the significant gender imbalance in the Head Start teacher population. There was an imbalance in identifying female teachers. No male teachers were interviewed for this study. Lastly, due to the research method, data relied mainly on the trustworthiness of the first-person's account, limiting the use of the results.

Delimitations refer to the decisions made by the researcher about the scope and focus of the study and how these decisions may affect the study's findings. First, this study was not intended to subtract or disprove current Indigenous ways of teaching and knowing but rather to add to the foundational knowledge. In addition, it was possible choosing the research set in non-AIAN Head Start classrooms would have missed Indigenous teacher standpoints in other forms of early childhood education, such as private care or family child care homes. Lastly, the study methodology limited the number of participants available. The in-depth multipart interviews provided detailed and exhaustive data of four Indigenous teachers.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early childhood education in the United States has been shaped by various policies and programs, including Head Start. Understanding the history and evolution of these initiatives is crucial for educators and policymakers working in this field. In addition, there is a growing recognition of the importance of considering cultural perspectives and knowledge systems in teaching and learning, specifically for marginalized communities like the Indigenous population in the United States.

The literature review aims to provide an overview of the early childhood education field in the United States, focusing on Head Start programming. Furthermore, this review explores Head Start's attempt to consider cultural perspectives through its multicultural principles and its relationship with Indigenous communities through American Indian and Alaskan Native (AIAN) Head Start. This review also ventures into Indigenous ways of knowing and offers discourse around Indigenous constructs of teaching against the backdrop of Eurocentric and Westernized pedagogy. Various frameworks of teaching and knowing are explored and critiqued, such as culturally responsive scholarship, decolonizing education, and critical Indigenous pedagogy of place (CIPP).

Lastly, this review establishes the importance of teacher identity to understand classroom policies and practices. It examines the use of Indigenous standpoint theory (IST) in Head Start classrooms to center Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in early childhood education.

Early Childhood Education in the United States

Early childhood education is a marginalized field (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015; Blake et al., 2019; McLean et al., 2020; National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.). Historically, the United States has not given teachers the resources, financial allocation, or professional clout due to a lack of funding, lower expectations, and a general lack of interest in the youngest and most vulnerable nonvoters. In 35 states, parents are expected to cover much of the cost of care, paying more for the care of their youngest than their home mortgages (Sharrock & Patterson, 2020).

Early childhood education (ECE) is a term encompassing a wide range of workforce professionals, family child care, child care centers, home-based programming, infant/toddler programs, and preschools providing care to children prebirth–5 years old (Nicholson & Kroll, 2015). This review does not include care situations such as traditional babysitting, nanny care, mother's helper, foster care, or care for a child through a relative. However, academia would benefit if more research were available on these matters.

People in the United States expected the ECE workforce to shoulder much of the care during the COVID-19 global pandemic crisis, with so little concern for their safety and well-being because this field is relatively poorer, needs more cohesion, and is made up of mainly women of color (McLean et al., 2020) The National Association for the Education for Young Children (2019) summarized the historical marginalization in this field in their position statement *The Social-Cultural Context of Child Development and Learning*. The National Association for the Education for Young Children (2019) stated:

> Traditionally, the dominant narrative in the United States—in our history, scientific research, education, and other social policy and media—has reflected the ways in which society has granted or denied privilege to people based on certain aspects of identity that society tends to favor with easier access to power structures include being able-bodied, US-born, Christian, heterosexual, cisgender, thin, educated, and economically advantaged. . . . Few men enter the field of early childhood education, reflecting the historic marginalization of women's social and economic roles—which has had a particularly strong impact on women of color. Comprising primarily women, the early childhood workforce is typically characterized by low wages. It is also stratified, with fewer women of color and immigrant women having access to higher education opportunities that lead to the educational qualifications required for higher-paying roles. Systemic barriers limit upward mobility, even when degrees and qualifications are obtained. (para. 3)

Perhaps the most significant evidence of marginalization in this field has been the apparent need for more data and scientific research regarding the demographics of the adult working population. The literature has relied heavily on data from the U.S. Office of Head Start (OHS) and The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. However, considerable data gaps are observable, specifically in private care, family child care, and alternative preschool programming.

Head Start in the United States

The OHS oversees Early Head Start servicing children from prenatal–3 years old and Head Start servicing children 3–5 years old. Head Start and Early Head Start are federally

funded, nationwide early childhood programs with uniform purpose, mission, and standards but with varied access and quality, according to research from The National Institute for Early Education Research's (NIEER) *State(s) of Head Start* report (Barnett & Friedman-Klaus, 2016). Within the OHS, there are various programs with varied purposes for its funding. These programs include the AIAN Head Start, located solely on recognized Tribal lands, and the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, which provides schooling and care to seasonal migrant farm workers and their children.

Program funding is distributed among delegate agencies contracted to operate center-based, home-based, and family childcare (Head Start Act, 2007). All programs must meet OHS performance standards that include regulations for program management and quality improvement, monitoring and implementing quality education and child development services, monitoring and implementing quality health services, monitoring and implementing quality family and community engagement services, and monitoring and implementing fiscal infrastructure. Programs are required to meet the needs of their community and must pass federal reviews to continue their funding.

Much like the rest of the field of ECE, prevailing social attitudes about the priority of the young child have been reflected in teacher pay. Head Start and Early Head Start teacher salaries have been so low, in every state they have earned less than public school teachers and less than the state median income (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2022). On average, Head Start teachers made $24,000 less than public elementary school teachers with the same credentials in 2022, which increased to $27,000 compared to Early Head Start teachers. In states like Massachusetts and New York, the gaps exceeded $40,000. It is almost like early educators face penalties for

working with younger children in all states—they have been 7 times more likely to live in poverty than teachers in the K–8 system (Barnett & Friedman-Klaus, 2016). Add racial identifiers to the mix, and researchers have found Black early educators have been paid, on average, $0.78 less per hour than their white peers (McLean et al., 2020).

It is not solely teacher education holding back salaries and recognition. Reviewing a snapshot of the ECE field, almost 30% of Early Head Start teachers had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to the 72% of Head Start teachers had a bachelor's degree (Barnett & Friedman-Klaus, 2016, Administration for Children and Families, 2022). Unsurprisingly, low wages, despite increasing education and training requirements, have resulted in high turnover and an inexperienced workforce for a significant career (Ullrich et al., 2016). The OHS is a crucial foundation for the education and development of many young children and their families. Nevertheless, the increasing demands and responsibilities of teaching in ECE have yet to translate into sufficient pay and professional recognition. This may exacerbate equity disparities, especially for women of color.

To meet disparities, both in their work and in the communities they serve, OHS has guiding multicultural principles for all programs, including AIAN and migrant programs, to support equitable classrooms and programming. OHS released research literature in 1991 and 2008 because "in a time of rapid demographic changes across the nation, the service areas of Head Start and Early Head Start programs are more racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse than ever before" (Administration for Children and Families, 2010, para. 3).

The multicultural principles serve as a resource to improve programming and service delivery for children and families (Administration for Children and Families, 2024). Unlike the Head Start performance standards that require programs to demonstrate their respect for and respond to all the different cultures in their service area, the principles recognize program staff and administrators are rooted in their own culture and, therefore, play a fundamental role in the systems and services. The principles are not attached to funding or performance reviews but are considered best practices for the programs and align with some OHS policies. See Table 1 for the current Head Start multicultural principles and a description of how they should affect programming and how they align with some of the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS; Administration for Children and Families, 2024). These principles guide teachers and staff to create supportive and inclusive environments that celebrate diversity and promote equity in ECE.

Table 1

Head Start Multicultural Principles

Principle	Description
We are all shaped by culture: Each of us is rooted in culture that is unique, evolving, and influenced by many factors, including our family, community, and history.	From infancy, cultural identities are developed by close relationships. These identies include values, beliefs, tranditions, and practices. Connection to HSPSS: Education and Child Development Services; Collaboration and Communiation with Parents; Family Engangement; Personnel Policies
Equitable Programs Embrace Reflection and Change: Culturally sustaining programming challenges systemic, community, and personal biases and teaches skill to foster belonging	Stereotypes and misinformation interfere with effective program services. Cultural knowledge is acquired. Teachers and staff should strive to develop cultural competence by continually learning about and reflecting on their own cultural biases and assumptions. Connection to HSPSS: Education and Child Development Services, Family Engangement, Personnel Policies

Table 1 (continued)

Head Start Multicultural Principles

Principle	Description
Child- and Family-specific Cultural Knowledge is Essential: Staff should learn about the cultures of each family enrolled in the programs and confront stereotypes	Eleminating bias and stereotypes is a continuous process, often changed by learning through relaitonships from the families in our care. A focus on strengths, knowledges, and skills will develop cultural sustaining environments. Connection to HSPSS: Family Engagement, Education and Child Development Services, Personnel Policies
Culture is an Asset: Each person's racial, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural identity is a strength to be developed and sustained while they acquire the skills they need to function in our diverse society.	In the safety of nurturing and supportive relationships, cultural identities should be recognized and honored in the program. Family culture is seen as a source of strength. Environments should promote learning a variety of skills, including respecting others. Connection to HSPSS: Teaching and Learning Environment, Child Mental Health and Social and Emotional Well Being, Personnel Policies
Exposure to Different Cultures Promotes Understanding: Multicultural programming helps children respect and value individual and intersecting cultural differences.	Every child is unique and every child belongs. A sense of belonging celebrates unique and intersecting identities. A 'color-blind' approach is not helpful in developing a positive sense of belonging. Connection to HSPSS: Education and Child Development Services
Inclusive Curriculum is Impactful: Educators can promote the relevance of children's cultures by making curriculum choices and adaptations that are inclusive and developmentally appropriate for their learners.	Children play a role in designing the curriculum. Classroom learning environments should be responsive to the unique identity of the children, including multiple ways of learning. Connection to HSPSS: Teaching and Learning Environment, Curricula, Additional Services for Children with Disabilities
Dual Language Instruction Supports Young Learners: Effective programs promote the continued development of languages spoken in the home while facilitating the acquisition of English.	Language acquisition is a natural process and the child's first language facilitates learning in the young years. Supporting first language in the classroom facilitates learning English as a second language. Connection to HSPSS: Teaching and the Learning Environment, Personnel Policies

Table 1 (continued)

Head Start Multicultural Principles

Principle	Description
Staff Diversity Matters: Culturally sustaining programs recruit, hire, and support program staff who reflect and affirm the cultural diversity of their community and families.	Programs should hire staff that reflect the racial and ethnic population of the children enrolled in the program. Teachers and staff should value and affirm the lived experiences of the community. Connection to HSPSS: Personnel Policies, Staff Qualifications and Competency Requirements, Training and Professional Development
Quality Programming Reflects the Diverse Cultures Within the Community: Culturally sustaining programming is shaped primarily by the communities, staff, and families of each Head Start program.	Programs systems and services should be reviewed for institutional bias and should be equity-focused. Active promotion of social justice and equity for all children and families should be found through systems, services, policies, and practices Connection to HSPSS: Collaboration and Communication with Parents; Family Engagement; Policy Council and Policy Committee, Education and Child Development Services
Inclusive Systems Help Adults and Children Thrive: The well-being of everyone — children, families, and staff — is promoted by including culturally sustaining programming and practices into all systems and services.	All aspects of the Head Start Muticultural Principles should apply to various policies and procedures in order to shift organizational culture. Prioritizing data to inform and design responsive inclusive systems. There should be buy-in from program staff, parents, and the surrounding community. Connection to HSPSS: Purpose; Management Systems; Determining Community Strengths, Needs, and Resources, Child Nutrition, Personnel Policies

Head Start and Indigenous Education in the United States

There has been a growing movement to educate Indigenous children in schools about their cultural heritage and traditions. Although not legally binding, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples stated, “Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories, and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information” (United Nations, 2007, Article 15).

The United States was originally 1 of the 4 dissenting votes in 2007 with 144 states affirming the declaration. The United States only reversed its decision under President Obama in 2010. In the Statement of Support, the White House recognized the United States sought to progress its relationship with Indigenous people and, "most importantly, it expresses aspirations of the United States, aspirations that this country seeks to achieve within the structure of the U.S. Constitution, laws, and international obligations, while also seeking, where appropriate, to improve our laws and policies" (Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, 2010, p. 1).

The U.S. Constitution directed public education is a state matter that must uphold federal safeguards; therefore, states and their people hold authority over the education of their citizens (Amendment X). Still, since 1965, the federal government has funded, regulated, and publicly aided over 38 million children through Head Start programming (Administration for Children and Families, n.d.). In 2019, over $10 billion was budgeted for the program, resulting in 1,047,000 low-income children and their families receiving services (Office of Head Start, 2022a). Head Start has served a small but significant percentage of the nation's millions of children under 5 years old. The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation has funded research to improve quality and child and family outcomes. The data collection and research recommendations have significantly guided state and local early childhood policy (Kooragayala, 2019).

In 2021, President Biden presented the creation of universal preschool to Congress under his *Build Back Better Act* (U.S. House of Representatives, 2021). Lynch (2021) reported universal preschool assured "services would be universally available to all children in the state and be high quality, free, inclusive, and offered for at least 1,020 hours annually" (p. 3). The *Act*

did not pass at the federal level, but California committed to universal preschool for all 4-year-olds by 2025–2026 (Melnick et al., 2022). Policies created around Head Start may influence these early childhood programs in the future.

The current shortcomings of the existing policies were they failed to acknowledge the Indigenous experience of children and their families enrolled in non-American Indian Alaskan Native (AIAN) Head Start and did not explicitly support this community. Based on Pacini-Ketchabaw and Taylor's (2015) recommendations, policymakers must expressly acknowledge the "assumed-to-be" (p. 2) order of unfolding in childhood development is not universal and recognize it is based on Western Eurocentric epistemology. The dominance of Eurocentric and Westernized practices may silence programs, policies, experiences, and interactions that could reflect and support Indigenous staff, parents, and children.

This recommendation was not novel. In 2003, the governing body of Head Start released a summary report of the research available on early childhood practices in AIAN communities (Marks et al., 2003). The *Head Start Act* (2007) noted programming should be shaped based on research that meets Head Start's definition of "principles of scientific research" necessary to be considered for policy (Section 637). Section 637 of the *Head Start Act* (2007) defined "principles of scientific research" as:

> [P]rinciples of research that—
>
> (A) apply rigorous, systematic, and objective methodology to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs;
>
> (B) present findings and make claims that are appropriate to and supported by methods that have been employed; and

(C) include, as appropriate to the research being conducted—

(i) use of systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;

(ii) use of data analyses that are adequate to support the general findings;

(iii) reliance on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and generalizable findings;

(iv) strong claims of causal relationships, only with research designs that eliminate plausible competing explanations for observed results, such as, but not limited to, random assignment experiments;

(v) presentation of studies and methods in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, to offer the opportunity to build systematically on the findings of the research;

(vi) acceptance by a peer-reviewed journal or critique by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review; and

(vii) consistency of findings across multiple studies or sites to support the generality of results and conclusions. (42 *U.S.C.* § 9801 et seq.)

Policymakers should pass policies based on research that respects the people they serve, such as Indigenous communities. This research should also meet the tenets of Indigenous research. According to Marks et al. (2003):

> American Indian and Alaska Native children have not always been the direct beneficiaries of knowledge gained through research. Very little evidence has been systematically gathered from Head Start programs that serve these children. To date, understanding the differences across and within AI-AN populations has remained largely

> outside the body of knowledge derived from systematic, large-scale research on early childhood development. To the extent that studies have been conducted, they often are ethnographic or case studies, which, although rich with detail and understanding, may be limited in their generalizability and are not necessarily the best method for producing knowledge that can be turned into strategies to better serve American Indian and Alaska Native children. (p. 3)

Strategies turn into policies that turn into praxis. These concerns were echoed during Tribal consultations between the OHS and Sovereign Nations in Region XI in 2021. The Tohono O'odham Nation, a federally recognized tribe in southern Arizona, expressed concerns over assessments required to rate their classrooms tied to federal funding (Office of Head Start, 2021). The tribe's request to exempt the required evaluations echoed the policy recommendations mentioned earlier—the developers of the assessment should provide research data to show the instruments are valid for Indigenous populations. The Chairman of the Tohono O'odham Nation stated, "There are 'white-paper' references on the importance of cultural competency and respect . . . but no credible information on how [the assessment] influences tribal teachers or children" (Office of Head Start, 2021, p. 11).

Another example of the mismatch of research meeting policy has been the over-identification and support of children with disability in AIAN communities. Standard screening tools do not consider the cultural and geographical contexts of the community and often may lack validity and reliability (Whitesell et al., 2022). Once children are identified as having a disability, top-down treatments may not use the strengths of the tribe but instead rely on unvalidated sources of measurement for intervention (Whitesell et al., 2022). This is of concern

because the number of AIAN families and children living outside of Region XI continues to grow and are more involved in nonspecific AIAN Head Start.

AIAN Head Start

The AIAN Head Start program was established in 1965 with 34 programs around the country; at the time of this study, the program served 23,208 children in 153 programs across 26 territories (National Indian Head Start Directors Association, 2021). In 2015, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published the first demographic study of Region XI AIAN Head Start children and their families, classrooms, and programs (Bernstein et al., 2018). In 2019, the same survey was duplicated and designed to describe the strengths and needs, accurately portray the children and families served, and understand the cultural and linguistic experiences of Region XI AIAN Head Start (Bernstein et al., 2021). Of all AIAN children in Head Start, 54% were served in Region XI and 46% of AIAN children and families were served in non-AIAN Head Start programs.

The Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) has been completed in all Regions I–X since 1997. The AIAN FACES 2015 (Bernstein et al., 2018) report was the first of its kind for Region XI; unlike the other geographically based regions, Region XI was defined by their setting and populations served—AIAN communities. Both AIAN FACES (2015, 2019) studies extended a previous survey by Head Starts operating off Native Indian reservations (Bernstein et al., 2018; Bernstein et al., 2021) . There are 13 operating OHS regions within the United States. AIAN FACES 2015 was completed to fill the gap in research to serve Native communities better (Marks et al., 2003, Bernstein et al., 2018). AIAN FACES 2019 (Bernstein et al., 2021) reported:

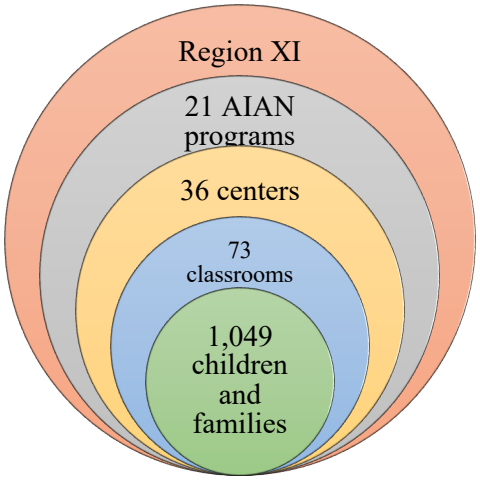
> FACES includes AIAN children served in Regions I—X . . . however, because the regions' AIAN children represent only a small percentage of all children in Head Start, the number of AIAN children in the FACES sample is too small to provide reliable estimates of what the true scores would be for the AIAN population served by Regions I—X. (p. 6)

The federally recognized tribal study findings of AIAN FACES 2015 were based on 1,049 children and their families from Region XI AIAN Head Start programs (Bernstein et al., 2018). The AIAN FACES 2019 study had 720 children (Bernstein et al., 2021).

As seen in Figure 1, the 2015 findings included 73 classrooms representing 36 centers across 21 programs. These findings provided "the first national picture of Region XI Head Start" (Bernstein et al., 2018, p. 28). About 65% of all classrooms had an overwhelming majority (75%–100%) of AIAN children. Only 50% of the classrooms had a lead teacher who self-identified as AIAN, alone or in combination with another race or ethnicity. Alternatively, 81% of all children surveyed described themselves as American Indian or Alaskan Native, alone or in combination with another race or ethnicity.

Figure 1

AIAN FACES 2015 Sample



Note: Adapted from *Descriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and: AI/AN FACES Fall 2015-Spring 2016 Data Tables and Study Design,* by S. Bernstein, L. Malone, A. Kopack Klein, C. Bush, K. Feeney, M. Reid, S. Lukashanets, & N. Aikens, 2018, OPRE Report 2018–2026, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, copyright 2018 by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Both studies were significant to acknowledge because they served the same community, and there was a slight chance similar centers and programs were chosen. Table 2 compares selected data for the use of discussion. The data points are only available from AIAN FACES 2015 (Bernstein et al., 2018) study because they were not reported under AIAN FACES 2019 (Bernstein et al., 2021) findings.

Table 2

Selected Comparisons Between AIAN FACES 2015 and AIAN FACES 2019

Survey question	AIAN FACES 2015	AIAN FACES 2019
Number of children and families from Region XI selected for survey	1,049	720
Parents reported speaking their tribal language to their children (sometimes, often, and very often combined)	47.5%	55.9%
Parents encouraged children to learn their tribal language	66.3%	73.6%
Parents consider it somewhat important and extremely important that a child learns a tribal language when a tribal language is spoken at home.	99.9%	99.9%
Teacher reported children with disabilities	14%	14.6%
Teacher identified as AIAN, alone or in combination with another race or ethnicity	50%	No information Provided

Note: Adapted from *Descriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and: AI/AN FACES Fall 2015-Spring 2016 Data Tables and Study Design,* by S. Bernstein, L. Malone, A. Kopack Klein, C. Bush, K. Feeney, M. Reid, S. Lukashanets, & N. Aikens, 2018, OPRE Report 2018–2026, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, copyright 2018 by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and *Decriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and Families: AI/AN FACES Fall 2019 Data Tables and Study Design*, by S. Berstein, M. Dang, A. Li, A Kopack Klein, N. Reid, E. Blesson, J. Cannon, J Harrington, A. Larson, N. Aikens, L. Tarullo, & L. Malone, *OPRE Report 2021-28,* Office of Planning and Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, copyright 2021by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The average preschool classroom had 13 students with a 1 to 5 adult ratio, with most teachers having over 5 years of experience. More than 33% of the teachers had over 10 years of teaching experience (Bernstein et al., 2021). The mean salary of 553 AIAN teachers was $27,977 (Bernstein et al., 2021)

In addition, the AIAN FACES 2015 study found Indigenous parents' sense of belonging was high even though they did not speak their native language (Bernstein et al., 2018). Bernstein et al. (2018) found 77% of Indigenous parents agreed or strongly agreed "Being a part of the tribe or cultural group was important to me" (p. 56). Approximately half of Indigenous parents "speak or are learning to speak their native language" (Bernstein et al., 2018, p. 42). Regarding children's learning, positive statistically significant changes were found in all categories except

letter and word knowledge and early writing between Fall 2015 and Spring 2016. Teacher reported child's problem behaviors did not improve or got worse throughout the time; this included behavior deemed aggressive, hyperactive, and withdrawn.

Most research on AIAN Head Start has relied on quantitative data and case studies that provide a descriptive glimpse of program quality, an impoverished viewpoint of health and necessity, or at best, reports created outside Indigenous settings. For example, in the concluding considerations of the AIAN FACES (2015) study, the researchers noted the data often found by "outside" researchers often relied on instruments based on "individual experiences" (Bernstein et al., 2018, p. 27). This was a stark difference in how many Indigenous lived. Bernstein et al. (2018) stated, "Within tribal communities, the community itself is recognized as a unit of identity . . . Interdependence is valued, and traditional notions of kinship extend beyond biological connections and into the broader community family of support" (p. 27). Ways of knowing are challenging to measure with traditional, Westernized and Eurocentric, analysis tools.

Ways of Knowing in AIAN Head Start

Ways of knowing in AIAN Head Starts were defined as practices and praxis unique to sites such as these that may not have been captured through traditional scientific methods (Sarche & Spicer, 2008; Sarche et al., 2016). For example, Indigenous populations fundamentally have believed early childhood education and resiliency begin with the truth—children are sacred gifts. Universally, Indigenous communities have believed in a creator intimately as a part of their life, from preconception to birth, childhood, and adulthood. Along the way, the community has shaped the child's development, providing a sense of identity and

belonging, revealing expectations, and offering protection through elders and community participants.

A way to measure the epistemological stories has been through storytelling. Storytelling has offered insight into the ways of knowing in Indigenous communities that act as sacred spaces (Iseke, 2013). It is more than just oral language. When critiquing an early childhood curriculum framework, Indigenous scholar and early childhood advocate Bear Nicholas recalled receiving pushback about having elders speak their native language in the classroom because most Indigenous families had marked English as their primary home language (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015). Bear Nicholas responded although Indigenous families may speak primarily English, it was not their home language. Pacini-Ketchabaw and Taylor (2015) stated, "The mother-tongue of the children is the language of the community, even though the children may not speak it as their first language" (p. 89). This is a concept known as "language in motion" rather than "language in place," where the latter allows members to coconstruct Indigenous identity as part of their learning through the oral interactions they are a part of (Hornberger, 2014, p. 285).

Previous academic research has defined Indigenous practices and demonstrated unique methods of Indigenous ways of knowing (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015). Indigenous practices are culturally safe; trauma- and violence-informed; and meet physical, social, and spiritual needs (Wright et al., 2019). In addition, Indigenous pedagogies have been studied to be primarily relational, relying heavily on storytelling, observations, and the use of nature as a teacher (Peterson et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2019). When Indigenous Head Start teachers are mandated to teach the obligatory curriculum, as in AIAN Head Start classrooms, they must do so

through a multistep process that requires “remaking and reweaving” (Henward et al., 2019, p. 34) to adapt the material for their children and families.

Overall, Indigenous ECE has been understudied and plagued by Westernized and Eurocentric research requirements. Even though Head Start provided a guide through multicultural principles, by not being attached to funding, many of its goals have acted merely as suggestions. In addition, separate from Indigenous knowledge principles that recognized the lividness of Indigenous practices, incorporating these ways of teaching and knowing may be seen as a “form of settler appropriation” (Ashton, 2015, p. 90). Indigenous ways of knowing are distinct and unique and are often found outside of AIAN programs if one knows how to see them.

Toward Indigenous Constructs of Teaching

Eurocentric constructs of teaching and learning may oppress marginalized communities. In response to this issue, frameworks have emerged to provide more inclusive and equitable educational experiences for diverse students; however, gaps remain. This portion of the literature critically analyzes concepts and constructs to further the knowledge base of academia.

The purpose of analyzing the following literature was not to establish a hierarchy but to see how all literature can have a place in academia and the classroom while simultaneously supporting Indigenous communities. This section codifies Eurocentric teaching constructs, exploring various frameworks of teaching and knowing, and arriving at existing Indigenous research in education.

This literature review is not exhaustive, but identifies key aspects of each framework and its relationship with Indigenous disciplines. In addition, though these ways of knowing are

correct and have been validated in their own right, each section critiques why they would not apply best to studying Indigenous communities.

Eurocentric Constructs of Teaching

Eurocentrism, at its core, has established and sustained Whiteness (Souto-Manning et al., 2019). As Brayboy and Chin (2019) acknowledged when developing Indigenous frameworks, "Colonization is endemic, particularly in the education of Native peoples" (p. 54). First, the supposed founders of early childhood education were based solely on white, middle-class, European children (Souto-Manning et al., 2019). The blind acceptance of such knowledge made the early childhood setting Eurocentric, as if only Piaget could be the messenger of childhood development. Smith (2012) wrote, "This form of global knowledge is generally referred to as 'universal' knowledge," in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (p. 66). Smith (2012) continued, the knowledge is "available to all and not really 'owned' by anyone, that is, until non-Western scholars make claims to it" (p. 66).

Secondly, a curriculum that does not prioritize or study historically marginalized children and their families establishes a norm that may or may not be supportive of others (Souto-Manning et al., 2019). Using talking circles as a form to decolonize education, Barkaskas and Gladwin (2021) found "colonial influence on educational systems has not only created symbolic and literal violence upon colonized peoples, but it also hinders the cognitive and emotional development of all learners in the process of learning and meaning-making" (p. 23). Barkaskas and Gladwin (2021) concluded due to the lack of prioritization of Indigenous voices in the work, education has served as a form of "cognitive imperialism" (Battiste, 2000, p. 198).

Third, established theories and proposed best practices have not considered social and systemic injustices in the United States. They have not considered the "range of life contexts" of culturally, linguistically, and racially under-researched communities and contexts (Souto-Manning et al., 2019). These theories do not answer the question, "Best for whom?"

Various Frameworks of Teaching and Knowing

In this section, teaching knowledge, theories, and ways of knowing are attended to and analyzed. Battiste (2002) stated, "Indigenous scholars discovered that Indigenous knowledge is far more than the binary opposite of Western knowledge. . . . Indigenous knowledge fills the ethical and knowledge gaps in Eurocentric education" (p. 5). In an effort to understand the necessity of an Indigenous research paradigm, scholars must acknowledge "tools cannot be removed from their dominant beliefs" (Wilson, 2008, p. 13).

Culturally Responsive Practices

Culturally responsive scholars have been at the base of non-Eurocentric ways of knowing and teaching. In framework, Lomotey and Lowery (2015) requested educators "draw upon the culture of the student/learner, enabling them to see themselves in the curriculum" (p. 119). It is also a pedagogy meant to "empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 18). A set of beliefs and norms are central to this way of knowing and learning. They include openly acknowledging race and its role in education, affirming identities through a culture of caring, and critically examining understanding and development (Lomotey & Lowery, 2015). Through the Head Start multicultural principles, the Administration for Children and Families (2010) defined the practice as:

> The integration of assessment and curriculum practices: program staff must learn about the individual strengths, abilities, and preferences of each of the children enrolled in their program, and then find ways to plan and implement a curriculum that is based upon these strengths. (p. 36)

A critique of a culturally responsive frame is the responsibility of carrying it out lies with the person in power and essentializes notions of culture. For example, it requires teachers and researchers to develop a sense of knowing, rather than acknowledging the fountain of knowledge already present. Concepts like empowering and drawing upon can symbolize a hierarchal power imbalance where power must be given or allowed. In addition, the end goal of culturally responsive pedagogy is a sense of academic achievement on behalf of the student (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). This way of knowing limits itself to schooling rather than an education, where the latter "extends prevailing power relationships and perpetuates the existing politically controlling cultural orientation" (Lomotey & Lowery, 2015, p. 118) rather than an education with the ability to "effectively function within their family, community, and race and to retain the integrity of their own culture in social contexts where unequal power relations exist among cultures" (Lomotey & Lowery, 2015, p. 118). Within the Indigenous community, this may mean young Indigenous children may learn to read and write English but may be unable to thrive within their community.

Decolonizing Education

The frames of decolonizing education have been often based on a conceptualization of ethnic and urban studies, linking with multicultural education, critical race theories, and even postcolonial studies (Coloma, 2020). Decolonizing education explicitly has resisted the

Eurocentrism of the West (Mackinlay & Barney, 2014). Its efforts have relied on telling the stories that must be told—often through disaggregating data and terms. By reclaiming land, practices, and stories, decolonized educators have also viewed those marginalized as having funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005). In addition, the critical pedagogy of decolonization requires a solid foundation of the past. Smith (2012) wrote, "To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledge" (p. 36). This type of theoretical framework provides a responsibility on behalf of the researcher and establishes respectful relationships and capacity building where there is a mutual benefit (Brayboy & Chin, 2019).

Unlike racialized minorities who have claimed legitimacy to the U.S. nation-state, Indigenous people's claims have differed significantly, and decolonizing education may not go far enough (Coloma, 2020). Indigenous populations may require no acceptance or validation by the U.S. nation-state; instead, they can claim sovereignty outright. In addition, decolonized education does not go far enough in recognizing some Indigenous populations. Smith (2012) explained:

> I have learned that I belong *partly* in Third World, *partly* in the Women of Color world, *partly* in the black or African world. I read myself into these labels *partly* because I have also learned that, although there may be commonalities, they still do not entirely account for the experiences of Indigenous peoples. (p. 37)

Covarrubias et al. (2019) wrote a decolonized educational framework could be used by all marginalized groups within the educational pipeline that "categorize, objectify, and dehumanize Communities of Color" (p. 139). However, it may not go far enough for Indigenous researchers

since the primary purpose of decolonized educational frameworks is to return to pre-colonization education rather than an Indigenization of the community.

Critical Indigenous Pedagogy of Place

Critical Indigenous pedagogy of place (CIPP) is a framework created by Filipina-American scholar Trinidad (Lowan-Trudeau, 2018; Trinidad, 2012). Trinidad (2012) advocated for *Indigenization*—prioritizing Indigenous ways of knowing while challenging academic knowledge with an anticolonial stance and empowering a cultural group and setting. Along with Indigenization, CIPP parallels the process with *reinhabitation*, where the Indigenous community rekindles an intimate relationship with the land that has been disrupted and injured. The framework aims to counteract *kaumaha* [cultural loss] syndrome, which arises from "deep grief and sorrow rooted in the collective sadness and moral outrage" (Trinidad, 2012, p. 2).

Trinidad (2012) described CIPP as "interweaving, replacing, or speaking against Western narratives of place that have been oppressive with Indigenous narratives that instill hope and healing" (p. 5). The understanding gained from the community benefits the Indigenous community. Though this framework is inspirational, this proposal does not mention how or who should do the work. One may ask if CIPP could be carried out by a non-Indigenous community member, and to what end.

Overall, Eurocentric and Westernized teaching constructs do not go far enough in undoing and unraveling the complexities of Indigenous communities. The supposed characteristic of these frameworks is to liberate a colonized perspective (Nakata, 2007b). It does so with either power that must be given, as seen with culturally responsive scholars and

decolonized education, or through discourses that struggle to assert clear parameters around who is doing the work.

Teacher Identity

The focus of this section is to center on the importance of the adult in the early childhood classroom, specifically the teacher. This centering is intentional. Whereas extensive literature has been written concerning the provision of education and an environment that liberates and decolonizes the student in the classroom, there have been fewer written on whom is guiding this journey. How the leader in the classroom identifies, including their history, journey, and education, impacts how they experience their programming.

Teacher identity refers to the beliefs, values, and experiences that shape a person's sense of self as a teacher. This identity includes a person's understanding of their role and purpose as a teacher, their beliefs about teaching and learning, and their personal and professional experiences. The source of their held beliefs, theories, and attitudes is a combination of observations, cultural and spiritual contexts, and their continual development (Edwards & Edwards, 2017; Gibbs, 2006; Lortie, 1976; Palmer, 1997). Teacher identity is a dynamic aspect of an educator's life shaped by their teaching experiences and methodologies (Palmer, 1997). A teacher's identity is closely tied to their individual teaching style, and there is a strong connection between teacher identity and teaching practices (Clandinin & Huber, 2005; Gee, 2001; Palmer, 1997).

Various factors play a role in teaching and knowing, including a person's cultural background, experiences as a student, and professional training and development. The way teachers engage with others, with cultural and social practices and assumptions, including

physical space and materials all impact how teachers construct their identities (Delaney, 2015; Woodrow, 2007). Importantly, teacher identity can influence how a person approaches their work and impact their interactions with students and colleagues, especially in borderlands of practice. Borderlands of practice are sites where "varying notions of 'best practices' converge, and sometimes conflict, with the professional knowledge and decision-making of teachers" (Delaney, 2015, p. 374). Narratives and life history approaches to understanding may clash and prevent teachers from building strong teacher identity that expresses themselves through agency and confidence in professional ability (Lasky, 2005).

Teacher identity is fluid, continuous, changeable, and not stable and predetermined (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). There are no fixed and established constructs as constituent factors of teacher identity. Therefore, teacher identity can evolve over time. Still, the foundations of teacher identity lay in their narratives and lived history.

The formation of Indigenous teacher identity has been mostly left out of academia. Much of identity research has been coconstructed and grounded with Erikson's 1959 selected papers, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, where the psychologist studied how social influences contributed to a person's outlook and personality. This approach focuses mainly on the individual process of identity and takes a much less sociocultural perspective claiming general identity is formed in relationships and interactions (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). Teacher context and narrative must play a key role when using identity to understand teacher practice and doing.

IST

The contradictions and gaps of Eurocentric and Westernized frameworks for teaching and knowing bring this academic effort to use a new lens for a deeper understanding of Indigenous

knowledge. A frame of IST was created as an alternative to Westernized and European colonization of higher education academia (Foley, 2003). As Nakata (2007b) wrote, "Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems work off different theories of knowledge that frame who can be a knower, what can be known" (p. 8). IST is a critical framework that seeks to challenge dominant knowledge systems and recognize the unique contributions of Indigenous peoples to our understanding of the world. Its partnership with Indigenous communities and its active combative state against the effects of colonization have been found even in Head Start classrooms (Cox et al., 2021; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015). IST has been led by foundational female scholars, made up of multiple Indigenous epistemologies, and has been a way "to make sense of what is affected by the dominant discourse and society in general" (Foley, 2003, p. 44; Meyer, 1998; Meyer, 2001; Rigney, 1999a, 1999b, West, 1998).

IST is a theoretical framework that highlights the importance of Indigenous peoples' unique perspectives, knowledge, and social and political experiences in understanding the world (Foley, 2003). IST posits Indigenous peoples' experiences of colonization, discrimination, and oppression have led to the development of distinctive ways of knowing, being, and relating to the world. These ways of knowing are grounded in Indigenous cultural practices, languages, and worldviews, and are characterized by a deep connection to land, community, and spirituality. It is more than a mere recounting of stories. Nakata (2007a) wrote:

> It is not a simple reflection of experience, and it does not preexist in the everyday waiting to be brought to light. It is not any sort of hidden wisdom that Indigenous people possess. It is a distinct form of analysis and is itself both a discursive construction and an

> intellectual device to persuade others and elevate what might not have been a focus of attention by others. (p. 11)

This method of inquiry emphasizes the importance of Indigenous peoples' perspectives, knowledge, and social experiences in understanding the world (Foley, 2003). At its core, IST uses the Japanangka paradigm, the Indigenous struggle of colonization and pain while continuing to have access to their own and shared power, to represent the diversity and struggle of being Indigenous. The influence of "the actuality of the every day" (Nakata, 2007a, p. 199) is defined by the relationships to the Indigenous experience which are a "multilayered and multidimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersections of time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and contesting discourses within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic, and political organization" (Nakata, 2007a, p. 199).

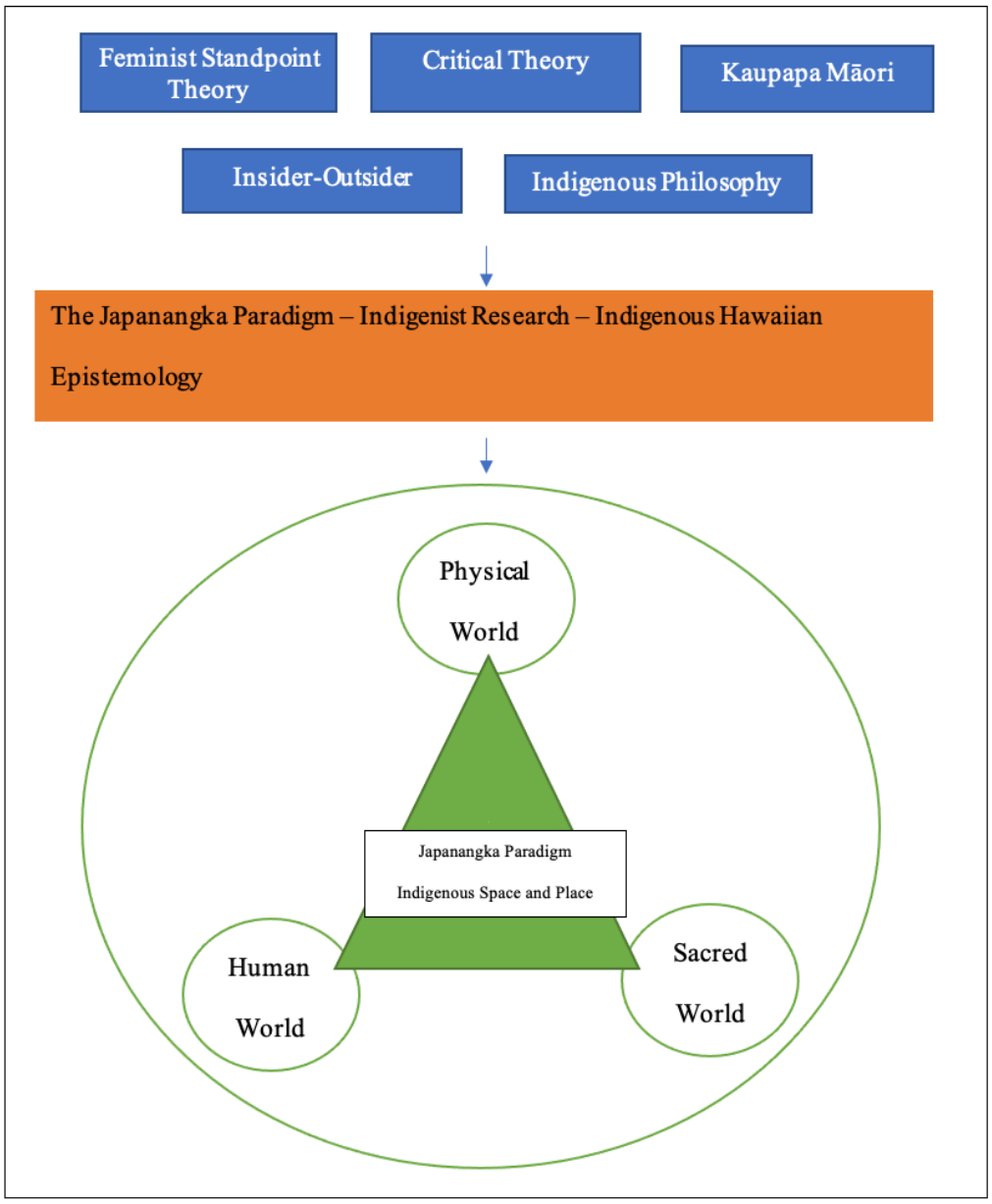
The triangulation of the Physical, the Human, and the Sacred world is a cumulative result of Indigenous views stemming from Aboriginal philosophy and Indigenous research perspective. The Physical world represents the land and acknowledgment Indigenous do not own the land; instead, we belong to the land. The Human world is the relationships and identities with people. The Sacred world is the spiritual laws for healing and care Indigenous have toward themselves and others. This triangulation privileges the voices of Indigenous peoples by acknowledging "Indigenous knowledges are plural and we are not boxed in by Eurocentric ideals and colonial discourse" (Briese & Menzel, 2020, p. 378). Indigenous knowledge cannot be separated by the land, relationships, and spirit nor can it be fragmented, lest it be used as a colonizers' assimilation tool.

Indigenous voices have informed the work resulting in its richness, as shown in Figure 2. IST is led by foundational female scholars, comprised of multiple epistemologies, and is a way "to make sense of what is affected by the dominant discourse and society in general" (Foley, 2003, p. 44). The framework also shares similarities with Smith's (2021) *Kaupapa Māori* research. Smith (2021) stated:

Researching in this sense, then, is not something owned by the West, or by an institution or discipline. Research begins as a social, intellectual, and imaginative activity. It has become disciplined and institutionalized with certain approaches empowered over others and accorded legitimacy, but it begins with human curiosity and a desire to solve problems. It is at its core an activity of hope. (p. 258)

Figure 2

The Contributing Voices of Indigenous Standpoint Theory



Note: Adapted from *Indigenous Epistemology and Indigenous Standpoint Theory* by D. Foley, 2003, *Social Alternatives*, *22*(1), 44–52; *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives* by S. Harding, copyright 1991 by Cornell University Press; *On Social Structure and Science* by R. K. Merton, 1996, copyright 1996 by University of Chicago Press; *Our Own Liberation: Reflections on Hawaiian Epistemology* by M. Meyer, 2001, *The Contemporary Pacific A Journal of Island Affairs*, *13*(1), 124–148, copyright 2001 by The Contemporary Pacific A Journal of Island Affairs; *Native Hawaiian Epistemology: Contemporary Narratives* by M. Meyer, 1998, copyright 1998 by Harvard University; *Towards An Australian Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory: A Methodological Tool* by A. Moreton-Robinson, 2013, *Australian Feminist Studies*, *28*(78), 331–347, copyright 2013 by Australian Feminist Studies; *Internationalization of an Indigenous Anticolonial Cultural Critique of Research Methodologies: A Guide to Indigenist Research Methodology and its Principles* by L. Rigney, 1999a, *Wicazo Sa Review 14*(2), 109, copyright 1999 by Wicazo Sa Review; and *Speaking Towards an Aboriginal Philosophy* by J. E. West, 1998, presented at First Conference Indigenous Philosophy, 'Linga Longa'Philosophy Farm, copyright 1998 by J. E. West.

IST also contains inspiration from an insider-outsider theoretical approach and Indigenist Research. Foley (2003) prescribed the litmus test to be partly determined by the researcher. Foley (2003) wrote, “The purity of the research outcomes . . . is enhanced if the Indigenous is researched by the Indigenous” (p. 46). It is more than mere positionality; instead, to use IST to fidelity is to position oneself to “continually challenge dominant, western, patriarchal structures and agendas in order to reframe, reimagine and decolonize” (Briese & Menzel, 2020, p. 376).

Drawing inspiration from Rigney’s (1999a, 1999b) view of Indigenist research, IST recognizes the Indigenous culture is not homogenous and contains “colonial internalization” (Foley, 2003, p. 48). Still, the voice of the Indigenous researcher should be centered because they are accountable not only to their institutions but also their community. Indigenist research has centered the voice of the Indigenous, concentrating Indigenous knowedge into resistance, political integrity, and sacred Indigenous voice. In this way, the researcher must locate themselves among “the networks of relationships that comprise Indigenous realities” (Kwaymullina, 2007, p. 15). Indigenous ways of knowing are plural and are not to be consolidated into Eurocentric ideals and discourse; however, all collectively contribute and strengthen the Indigenous standpoint (Briese & Menzel, 2020).

Essential to the framework is acknowledging those it benefits, who is doing the work, and defining the relationship between each. This is because IST provides “a means not only for Indigenous peoples to articulate our positions to non-Indigenous peoples but also amongst ourselves” (Kwaymullina, 2017, p. 16). Foley (2013), Nakata (2007b), and Moreton-Robinson (2013) maintained IST should only be used by Indigenous scholars. The cumulative knowledge of such Elder scholars allows younger, future Indigenous academics to participate in critical

Indigenous studies to research us back to life and find solid standing in academe (Kovach, 2018). The framework requires for research to support Indigenous life, it must have essential features for the recommendations to be applicable. The following criteria must be met:

1. The practitioner must be Indigenous.
2. The practitioner must be well-versed in various forms of social theory.
3. Knowledge gained from the community must benefit the Indigenous community.
4. And if possible, traditional Indigenous language should be used. (Foley, 2003; Cox et al., 2021)

At its essence, IST is an "activity of hope" (Smith, 2021, p. 258) that bases Human relationships, Physical curiosity, and Sacred voices at its core (Foley, 2003). It places the responsibility and authority of the Indigenous researcher to disrupt the dominant discourse to research and write in a liberating and emancipatory stance (Briese & Menzel, 2020). This collective research method's purpose is to "find a way to explore the actualities of the every day and discover how to express them conceptually from within that experience, rather than depend on or deploy predetermined concepts and categories for explaining experience" (Nakata, 2007a, p. 215). IST allows the researcher to focus on the story and the journey, rather than merely documenting facts.

In this literature review, I documented ECE in the United States and its journey with Head Start. In addition, Eurocentric and Indigenous teaching constructs and various frameworks were discussed as possible alternatives in research. IST was discussed as the only framework working against colonization while simultaneously emphasizing the Indigenous voice. The next

chapter discusses the framework and methods to advance Indigenous knowledge within the Head Start world.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

> Survivance, in my use of the word, means a native sense of presence, the motion of sovereignty and the will to resist dominance. Survivance is not just survival but also resistance, not heroic or tragic, but the tease of tradition, and my sense of survivance outwits dominance and victimry. (Vizenor, 1998, p. 93)

The Indigenous experience is ever-evolving and full of survivance, and this research focused on "desire instead of damage" (Tuck, 2009, p. 416). Indigenous research is a way to address the imperialism found in Head Start classrooms. By writing about it, it becomes "a part of our story, our version of modernity" (Smith, 2021, p. 21). National education policy has long held its effort to promote school readiness based exclusively on "rigorous, systematic, and objective" scientific research principles (*Head Start Act*, 2007, Sec 637). However, the *Head Start Act* (2007) standards have failed to recognize this is a form of gatekeeping and maintaining the Eurocentric and Westernized status quo. As the rate of Indigenous peoples increases off reservations, research should be meaningful—not merely tokenizing standard cultural respect but infused with the language of Indigenous ways of teaching and knowing. In essence, "Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes" (Smith, 2021, p. 31).

Research Question

This exploratory study examined the perceptions and lived experiences of Indigenous teachers who narrate their perspectives on the ways Indigenous identity informs pedagogical

practices in non-American Indian and Alaskan Native Head Start classrooms. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. How do Indigenous teachers describe, experience, and make meaning of the educational pedagogy in Head Start spaces in the Southern California regions?
2. How can Indigenous teachers ways of knowing and being inform Head Start educational practices and policies?

Methodologies

The nature of this study requires the reader to value knowledge, not only data verifiable as neutral or scientific but also the legitimacy of spiritual, social, and story-centered knowledge (Safir & Dungan, 2021). Before jumping into the research, the research must begin like the steps before the beginning of the weaving of a loom. A secure, tight, readied foundation must be set, and yarns and strings must be selected and placed on purpose for both the weaver and textile. These moments of pause, reflection, and "strengthening of relationality" (Tachine & Nicolazzo, 2022, p. 5) are intentional to understand the vital concepts in Indigenous research. It is not enough to be *in* an Indigenous community, researchers must establish authentic partnerships to build relationships that build knowledge and impact (Poupart et al., 2009).

Indigenous Standpoint Theory

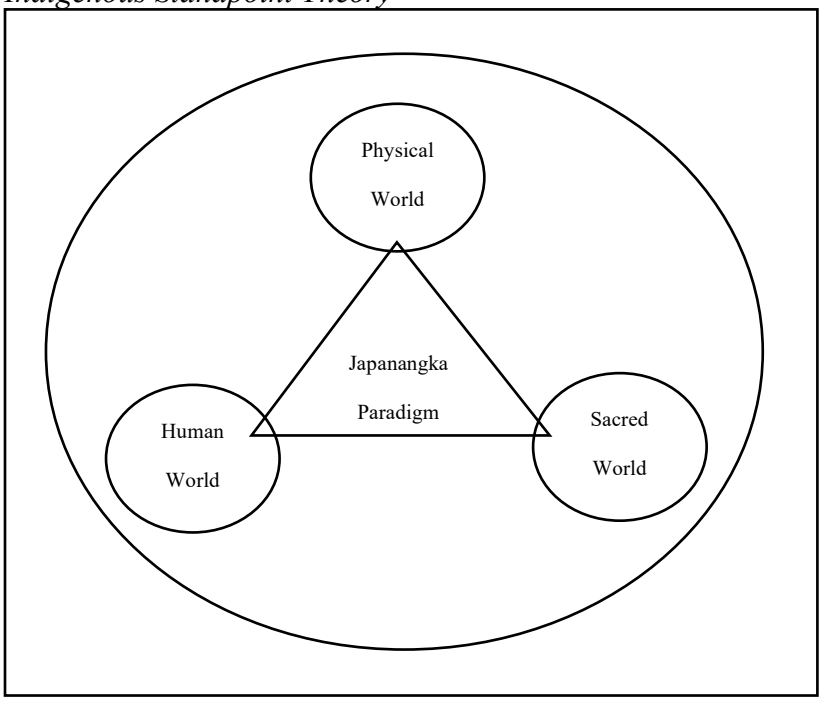
Methodology offers a theoretical perspective for understanding the approach and the rationale for selecting such studies (Coates et al., 2022). In addition, a methodology is a political act to research ourselves back to life rather than to extract precious knowledge, only to never reap the wealth again (Kovach, 2018). To preserve and retain Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous standpoint theory (IST) was used in this exploratory study to give testimony and document the

spirit of the Indigenous community (Foley, 2003). IST offers a space for Indigenous researchers to "reconcile their scholarship with their lived experience" (Greene-Blye & Finneman, 2023, p. 4). There is no homogenous Indigenous culture, and the Indigenous people have continued to exist in real-time. The Indigenous people are as varied as nature; yet, like nature, they require advocacy and protection. Therefore, the methodology of this study emerged as a means for the Indigenous community to "privilege the voices of Indigenous peoples" (Briese & Menzel, 2020, p. 376).

The IST is a theoretical framework emphasizing the importance of Indigenous peoples' perspectives, knowledge, and social experiences in understanding the world. At its core, IST uses the Japanangka paradigm—the Indigenous struggle of colonization and pain while continuing to have access to their own and shared power—to represent the diversity and struggle of being Indigenous (Foley, 2003). The triangulation of the Physical, the Human, and the Sacred world is a cumulative result of Indigenous views stemming from Aboriginal philosophy and Indigenous research perspective. The Physical world represents the land and acknowledges Indigenous people do not own the land; instead, they belong to it. The Human world is the relationships and identities with people. The Sacred world is the spiritual laws for healing and care Indigenous have toward themselves and others. Figure 3 visually represents IST, with defined relationships to the Indigenous experience.

Figure 3

Indigenous Standpoint Theory



Note: Adapted from *Indigenous Epistemology and Indigenous Standpoint Theory* by D. Foley, 2003, *Social Alternatives 22(*1), pp. 44–52, copyright 2003 by Social Alternatives.

Essential to the framework is acknowledging whom it benefits, who is doing the work, and defining the relationship between each. The framework requires for research to support Indigenous life, it must have essential features for the recommendations to be applicable. The following criteria must be met:

1. The practitioner must be Indigenous.
2. The practitioner must be well-versed in various forms of social theory.
3. Knowledge gained from the community must benefit the Indigenous community.
4. And if possible, traditional Indigenous language should be used. (Cox et al., 2021; Foley, 2003)

Overall, IST was used in this study as a framework for examining the participants' experiences, with particular attention to the relationships that surround them.

Narrative Research or Storytelling?

Determining the appropriate method(s) for a study is directly linked to the question(s) being asked. In this case, the questions directly linked to human experience and how the individuals reporting understand, organize, and interpret that experience. Though narrative research has been promoted as a paradigm predominantly useful for documenting and understanding a particular phenomenon, context, or experience, reporting standards require the interviewer to remain neutral (Levitt et al., 2018). The assumed neutrality is a Eurocentric and Westernized thought. Instead, Indigenous storytelling leans into the relationship while maintaining objectivity. The results of inquiry are of value to the community, not merely an individual researcher or reviewer (Behrendt, 2019).

Storytelling can indeed be considered a type of narrative research that can propel design and policy forward (Frost & Ouellette, 2011). However, it is imperative to note storytelling is a remnant of prehistory. Narrative research as a methodology has been considered; yet, I chose to place storytelling at the center of the study. Storytelling is "research in context" (Behrendt, 2019, p. 176) because these narratives exist best when one considers the time, place, and space in which the story is told. In addition, by allowing participants to construct and decide how and what story to share, these narratives are a collection of wisdom rather than an independent data set. The stories should not be taken out of context, which is why names and artifacts have been attached to each Indigenous teacher. This knowledge is contextual, as narrative data should be. Interviews are used as a conversation tool to support narrative inquiry, a collection of narratives,

collaborative process, a focus on human experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lastly, by centering storytelling, I aimed to normalize stories validating "our sovereignty, our culture, our laws, our connection to our land," (Behrendt, 2019, p. 178) and our stories are enough.

Positionality

The Indigenous research journey begins with establishing relational accountability. Relational accountability is about forming a respectful relationship with the ideas I am studying and the reader forming a relationship with me as a researcher (Wilson, 2008). This means understanding the journey that led me to this topic, where it fits into my life, and the factors influencing my point of view. I am a Mayan descendant of the Kaqchikel group from Guatemala where parts of our family still weave patterns, birds, and suns into *cinchos* and *huipiles*. When the family arrived in the United States when I was a young girl, a formal name change was recommended for easier assimilation into school and work. With a quick signature, the Spanish name *Vega* became official, erasing any connection, at least on paper, to my grandfather who was born in 1929 as Narciso Marroquin Xet of the Kaqchikel Tribe.

My father, born Jose Antonio Xet, became Antonio Vega. This concept is known as "onomasiological positioning," (Hornberger, 2014, p. 286) where Eurocentric or Hispanicized names are changed to afford upward mobility. It was not until I was a doctoral student that I could reclaim Xet as a professional. As an adult, I greet my Indigenous identity and connection to the Indigenous people around me with wonder. What I previously took for granted in childhood has become a conscious part of my identity as a professional, transnational, and globalized citizen.

As a legalized citizen of the United States, I acknowledge I have participated in colonizing practices on Indigenous territory. I do not hold official membership in the local Indigenous tribes of the Tongva people, the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar—what is now the Los Angeles basin where I reside.

In addition to being Indigenous, I approached this study as an expert and practitioner in early childhood education. My role in Head Start began in 2007 as a preschool teacher, and I have dedicated my career to serving all children and families. The relationships I have developed as an early childhood educator have given me deep knowledge of curriculum, policy, and practice. As a researcher, I have had access to Head Start classrooms and curricula, and I have had access to Indigenous early childhood educators in the region. My insider status was an advantage, not just as someone with experience in Head Start but also as an Indigenous researcher who has established relationships with potential participants. I was comfortable in the environment and familiar with the participants.

My familiarity with the participants was considered an advantage. As an Indigenous researcher, this was an asset because relationships allow research reflective of a ceremony where the atmosphere is open and fluid (Wilson, 2008). Participants can speak freely when the formalities of "traditional," dominant Eurocentric/Westernized, scientific research are set aside. I can cultivate a space where the dialogue is honest and open allowing for unique insights into Head Start spaces and Indigenous teacher practices and building trusting relationships with the Indigenous community. Overall, my lived experience as an Indigenous Head Start early childhood educator came to inform this study, and uniquely qualified my role as an Indigenous Researcher.

As a scholar, I have aimed to contribute to a world where Indigenous people want to exist. I have seen both the Eurocentric-Westernized lens and the Indigenous perspectives often left out. Academia has been a world not traditionally receptive to the existence of Indigenous ways other than a token acknowledgment or the recording of damages (Tachine & Nicolazzo, 2022; Tuck, 2009). I have aimed to engage in cultural relevancy and critical thinking, maintaining an ethical and respectful humility that allows an opportunity for relationships to grow as a member of these communities.

Research Process as an Indigenous Researcher

Indigenous research can often be defined as a liberation from the constructs of Eurocentric and Westernized methods. Decolonized research puts an "emphasis on relationships over knowledge, participation over expertise, and holism over specialized understandings" (Wulff, 2010, p. 1290). The research process of an Indigenous researcher is a way to understand Indigenous ways of life, values, and beliefs. As an Indigenous researcher, the following is my understanding:

- I recognize consent is not merely a contract; it must be understood from the participant's perspective, renegotiated, and reobtained throughout data collection. This process needs to be done both formally and informally throughout the study. At the beginning of this study, I provided the coparticipant with a written consent form to sign; however, I still verbally asked for permission to work with them and record our conversations during each session.
- I adopted a power-sharing or participatory model where the participant was viewed as both coresearcher and coproducer of knowledge. I assumed a stance of humility as a

researcher a contrast to the expert stance often assumed in Western research traditions. From this position, I entered the study with an attitude of openness, a commitment to learning with my coparticipant, a desire to understand, and a willingness to de-center myself as a researcher.

- I contended research is an empowering process benefiting the participants by revealing unacknowledged beliefs and thoughts (Smith, 2012).
- I denounced the claim, as the researcher, I had an exclusive right to the knowledge produced in the study. With my participant's permission, we discussed meaningful ways to share the findings with our communities. As Wilson (2008) wrote in *Research is Ceremony*, "If knowledge is formed in a relationship, it can't be owned" (p. 114).
- My responsibility as a researcher is to continuously address my research subjectivity and critically reflect on the decolonizing methods I set forth.

Methods

The Setting

The following sections review the Indigenous communities in Southern California through the perspective of early childhood education and Head Start programming. Before beginning, I want to acknowledge Indigenous people in the United States have suffered, experienced genocide, removal and loss of ancentrol lands and practices due to American exceptionalism (Fabre et al., 2023). The definitions and data sets in this section are based on classifications imposed by governments that historically have given little regard to Indigenous ways and sovereignty. When the discourse surrounds Indigeniety, we must recall most of the

relationship with colonialization has been erasure. Therefore, the characteristics described in the settings are true and accurate as a part of a larger picture (Díaz-Díaz, 2021).

Indigenous Communities in Southern California

In California, the Office of Head Start (OHS) enrolled 801 children under the Region XI AIAN tribal governments, compared to the 89,211 children in the rest of the state (Office of Head Start, 2022b). In 2018, only 2% of Californian Head Start families outside Region XI self-identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. This relatively low number could be due to statistical genocide—the erasure of Indigenous communities from public records that create significant barriers to accessing or benefiting from institutions (Comunidades Indígenas en liderazgo [CIELO], 2022). Most American Indian and Alaskan Native (AIAN) families live off reservations, and 80% live in metropolitan areas (Fabre et al., 2023). According to Mapping Indigenous LA (2020), a nonprofit organization that maps multiple layers of Indigenous history through digital storytelling and oral history, "When we consider Pacific Islanders and Latin American Indigenous Diasporas, Los Angeles has the largest Indigenous population of any city in the US" (para. 1).

The U.S. Census Bureau (2021) presented part of the story for Los Angeles County, where this study was held. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, California had 3.6% of the population self-report as AIAN, alone or in combination. Los Angeles County ranked lower in California counties in the self-reported AIAN (alone or in combination) category with 3.3%, or 327,930 people, of the total population. Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders, alone or in combination with other races, made up 0.6% or 55,817 people of the total population in Los

Angeles County in 2020. People self identifying as Hispanic or Latino in Los Angeles County in 2020 were 48%, 4,804,763 people, of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

There was a possibility of overlap in the data because the data did not disaggregate to include Hispanic or Latinos who considered themselves Indigenous, such as the Mexican Native Americans or the Indigenous Mayan groups in Guatemala. In 2021, the number of Latin American Indigenous people in Southern California was estimated to be over 200,000 (Miller, 2021). When considering these populations, the data may be unavailable due to a reluctance to reveal based on discrimination, both real and perceived. They may not think it relevant to mark under American Indian or Alaskan Native due to confusion on what that term means in the United States. If the data is available, it may come with an asterisk. This is a familiar experience to Native and Indigenous researchers. According to the National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center [NCAI], 2016):

> American Indians and Alaska Natives may be described as the "Asterisk Nation" because an asterisk, instead of a data point, is often used in data displays when reporting racial and ethnic data due to various data-collection and reporting issues, such as small sample size, large margins or errors, or other issues related to the validity and statistical significance of data on American Indians and Alaska Natives. (para. 5)

Head Start and Indigenous Communities

The invisibility of Indigenous populations has been well documented and perpetuated in academia (National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center, 2016). In *Research Methods for Early Childhood Education*, Flewitt and Ang (2020) discussed the invisibility of postcolonial early development research. The gap in the literature has been more than a mere

overlook. It has been a result of deep-seated social inequalities that have removed the voices of specific populations.

Alternatively, a suggested call has been made to produce data from often marginalized communities like the Indigenous early childhood population. Though research has benefited targeted AIAN communities living on reservations, less has been available for populations living off the reservations. The lack of these data has resulted in "limited, tailored services for members and their descendants" (Fabre et al., 2023, p. 6) who live outside of service areas that would benefit from the support of their cultural heritage and values. A recommendation made by the governing body of Head Start in a report titled *Invisible Children, Invisible Families: A Blueprint for Supporting the Child Care Needs of American Indian and Alaskan Native Families* called for mechanisms for tribes to collaborate to provide services in urban areas, specifically to serve these children and families, through data-driven methods (Fabre et al., 2023).

To produce data from marginalized communities, this exploratory study took place in Southern California to target Indigenous populations in a more concentrated area. To aid in emphasizing Indigenous practices in non-AIAN Head Start programs, selected participants were a part of the agencies participating in Region IX of the OHS, which included agencies like the Los Angeles County Office of Education, Orange County Office of Education, and the San Diego County Office of Education. Region IX was not considered an AIAN Head Start region.

For example, the Los Angeles County Office of Education has received funding to serve over 10,000 Head Start and Early Head Start children and expectant families (Office of Head Start, 2022a). Funding has been distributed among 16 delegate agencies contracted to operate center-based, home-based, and family childcare. All programs must meet OHS performance

standards, including meeting regulations for program management and quality improvement, monitoring and implementing quality education and child development services, monitoring and implementing quality health services, monitoring and implementing quality family and community engagement services, and monitoring and implementing fiscal infrastructure.

The physical setting of the urban Head Start classroom is usually made of modular buildings or repurposing of empty building space with an outdoor play structure, and children aged 6 weeks to 5 years old spend around 8–10 hours a day at the center, 5 days a week, all year (Administration for Children and Families, 2023). Agencies must monitor, among other items, the quality of the environment to ensure health and safety and promote developmentally appropriate practices (Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, n.d.). To requalify for funding, classrooms must meet quality assessment criteria as measured through environment rating scales, monitoring checklists, and teacher–child interactions assessments (Harms et al., 1998; Pianta et al., 2008). Most Head Start classrooms have two teachers with up to 16 children and an assistant teacher to provide breaks. Generally, meals and snacks are provided at school following nutritional guidelines (Administration for Children and Families, 2023). Additional services, such as medication or therapy, are given onsite and by trained professionals. Most performance standards requirements (e.g., family service workers, policy councils, and home-visiting socializations) occur at the child care center (*Head Start Act*, 2007).

For this exploratory study, the setting focused on Indigenous practices within the center-based child development and education standards. Health services, family and community engagement services, and fiscal infrastructure were not considered.

Participants

To understand how Indigenous ways of knowing affect or show up in Head Start spaces, ask the Indigenous teachers. These teachers were uniquely positioned to provide insights into their own experiences because "Indigenous research concerns itself with Indigenous matters" (Kovach, 2018, p. 215). Therefore, this study aimed to center Indigenous voices, to unsettle Eurocentric and Westernized thought, and to provide an opening for awakenings in education.

The researcher worked with a purposive sample of four self-identified Indigenous Head Start teachers teaching at their current school site for over 3 years. Purposive sampling is a method in which participants are selected based on the specific purpose of the study. In other words, the researcher selects participants based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research question rather than randomly selecting participants, such as how a weaver chooses the textile color to tell the story. This type of sampling produces "information-rich cases" (Leavy, 2017, p. 79) when the researcher wants to study a specific group of people or a particular phenomenon. The goal in this study was to gain an in-depth understanding so findings could be transferred to populations based on fittingness (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Participants for this study self-identified as Indigenous and had taught in non-AIAN Head Start classrooms for over 3 years. Self-identification removes the common barrier often created by governments to gatekeep Native populations or erasure of Natives completely (Hornberger, 2014). Colonization is an ongoing tool used to forget or cut connections to our Indigenous identity. Smith (2022) wrote:

> There are numerous oral stories which tell of what it means, what it feels like, to be present while your history is erased before your eyes, dismissed as irrelevant, ignored or rendered as the lunatic ravings of drunken old people. (p. 33)

Smith (2022) continued, "The negation of Indigenous views of history was a critical part of asserting colonial ideology" (p. 33). Indigenous teachers exist and are already doing the work. They are closest to the truth and can illuminate and bring understanding to the current experiences of Indigenous practitioners (Greene-Blye & Finneman, 2023). Therefore, using a worldview construct and identifying as Indigenous fulfilled the requirement under IST (Foley, 2003).

There were no other stipulations given apart from participant willingness. This choice was to reduce potential bias in the determination of Indigeneity. Though they could practice their craft and share their voice, this study did not expect participants' experiences to be monolithic but instead to hear their voice and how their Indigeneity harmonizes with their work. There are multiple ways of being Indigenous and various ways of defining "how to be" Indigenous in current society. For this study, I accepted every Indigenous teacher has an *indigeneity* at the core of who they are. Their understanding of "Indigenous knowledge" was respected and based on their lived experience. These definitions were not judged, changed, or corrected. Their knowledge was a part of the research but not the focus. This means I focused on discovering their *ways of knowing* rather than *how they came to know.* The focus was on how they perceived using knowledge in the Head Start classrooms and how it informed their practice. No other stipulations were given apart from a willingness to participate. For this study, a range of

experience and teaching knowledge were acceptable because I explored Indigenous teacher identity and their practice in the Head Start classroom.

On potential bias and ethical considerations, I used principles built on Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) work of researchers with Indigenous peoples and Archibald's (2008) Indigenous storywork for research and education. The four Rs of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence were used as guideposts to remind researchers to ask critical questions throughout the process, acknowledge and respect participants, and strive for beneficial outcomes for whole communities (Archibald, 2008). Relationships are considered necessary in Indigenous Research because they are a tenet in holding and sharing knowledge; therefore, it was valuable I had a previously established relationship with the participants (Nakata, 2007b).

The dangers of separating the knowledge from the participant without a relationship would be an example of the colonization and exploitation the Indigenous community has endured (Wilson, 2008). There was a bias because, as an Indigenous researcher, I am to protect and serve the population, not just the individual (Smith, 2021). Ethical considerations were at the base of this research, a promise the "beneficiaries of indigenous knowledge must be direct indigenous descendants of that knowledge" (Smith, 2021, p. 136). Though this research did not seek Tribal Institutional Review Boards, it honored them by maximizing the benefits, reducing risk for the individual and Indigenous community, and privileging treaty rights and traditional knowledge systems (Kuhn et al., 2020).

In brief introductions to each participant, I describe them using details from the first interview, understanding their journey up to the point they became teachers. This description allows the reader to begin establishing a relationship with myself and the participants—

acknowledging the vibrant color each worldview holds leading to the present. Each participant provided an artifact, a memento of their childhood, and their definition of joy. These interviews were the beginning of understanding their ways of knowing and pedagogy in the classroom as Indigenous teachers. These introductions were used to "capture desire instead of damage" for the reader to know more, emulating the feeling of seeing the art being manipulated in front of us (Tachine & Nicolazzo, 2022, p. 31). They may feel incomplete, as most works of art are, especially in the beginning.

As an introduction to the four participants, I begin by offering some similarities. All teachers identified as females and have been teaching for over three years. Their classrooms are located in Los Angeles County where they also reside. Each teacher has at least a bachelor's degree and speaks English and Spanish. In every classroom, they use the same curriculum and have similar daily schedules.

Stevie—Participant 1

Stevie shared:

> The plant that was gifted to me. . . . I thought about this pottery—it's so beautiful and so cultural. It adds something to the classroom. It brings me joy to see *artesenia*. The color, the make of it, the way they do things. The tradition of the pot itself. That pot that I didn't even take, that someone gifted it to me. I have that stuff here in the house. I know we are supposed to have beautiful things that identify you and the children. (see Figure 4)

Figure 4

Stevie's Plant

Stevie attended Head Start as a child, then was a parent in Head Start, and, at the time of the study, had been working in Head Start for over 10 years. As a child, Stevie recalled almost losing her identity as an Indigenous person. She shared:

> But thankfully, my mother, my grandmother, my aunt, made sure that we knew that my brothers and sisters and I knew we were a people of Mexico. They were here, who were strong, who were decent, who were good, and who were Mexican, and whose story comes like many, many, many others, where land was taken from us and then we were considered to be intruders in the land.

Stevie's recalled her sense of joy when her third-grade teacher gave her a certificate titled, "Sunshine." "It was a happy day," she told me. Stevie continued:

> It was a celebration, and we were celebrating Thanksgiving, and we were making butter. We weren't dressed as penguins [pilgrims]. Her focus was making some food. We made butter (from scratch!) and I ended with a tiny piece of butter. It was so delicious and so good. At the end of the day, she gave us awards. I was given an award of sunshine. I remember the certificate. She called me sunshine. That was third grade. She thought I was sunshine and that I was special. It made me feel proud and happy.

Estrella—Participant 2

Estrella shared:

> Yeah, that's an amazing experience because you're not just teaching the little ones, you know, you're learning from them, and they're making you a better teacher, for whoever comes next after us. So, you're constantly learning and growing as well with them.

One of Estrella's artifacts was a corner of her classroom with special memories of people and phrases (see Figure 5). She found solace in the memories these pictures hold. Estrella attended school as a young girl in Mexico and recalled her fondness of playing outside, sharing, "And I felt like it was different than here because in Mexico you go outside, right? You *have to* play with your friends. You do all these type of different games."

Figure 5

Estrella's Corner

Estrellas' sense of joy came from remembering eating coconut on the top of a roof at her grandma's house. Surrounded by fruit trees of plums in the yard, one would stand outside and unsuspectingly be in a winter wonderland made from coconut pieces. She said, "We will go to the top of the roof, and we'll sit down, we'll eat it, chew it, then we would spit it out outside like, it was like, 'Oh! It's snowing!''

Even as a teenager, going to school in Los Angeles, Estrella recalled the smells from home would send her back to happy moments in Mexico. Estrella stated:

> For me, I went to school in Mexico from preschool to kinder— all the way to third grade. In Mexico, you go outside all the time. Every single time that my mom makes tostadas now it takes me back to this lady that used to sell. As I was leaving school, my mom would pick us up, and the lady would be there, with her basket selling food. It was so good.

Rose—Participant 3

Regarding her artifact (see Figure 6), Rose shared:

> I remember I brought this when talking to them about culture. And I would have different pictures to show them how we cook or what we use. And I brought that to the classroom, and they were amazed. They were so amazed, and they were like, "It's the rock teacher! It's the rock!" (laughter)

Figure 6

Rose's Artifact

Rose understood being Indigenous because of how it was set apart from Westernized forms—"The language, the traditions, the food," she said, "I was a little bit different." Rose shared memories that made her want to be a teacher to her community. "I had a happy childhood," she told me. Rose stated:

> When I was in Elementary school there was a big playground, but the preschool area was separate. I remember standing by the fence and seeing children riding their tricycles. I said, "I want to be teacher." Another thing would be like when they would celebrate Cinco de Mayo, I was able to wear my red and white and green dress and my braids, and a lot of my classmates were dressed like me. I didn't wear pants. "Girls only use dresses,"

my dad would say. That day I saw more girls were using dresses. That day everybody was wearing Cinco de Mayo dresses.

At home, her dad wished to keep their heritage, so they only spoke Spanish. This resulted in Rosa's placement in English as a second language classes throughout high school, even though she also spoke English fluently. Struggling to find belonging, it was not until her college graduation she saw herself reflected in her studies. "Once I was graduating, it was a special moment because I chose to participate in this cultural ceremony," she said. Rose continued:

> It was optional, but I chose to participate. It had the colors and materials like the dresses I used to wear when I was younger. It was a joyful and happy moment. In seeing my family there. They were playing Spanish music. It was more like Aztec colors—really bright. During that ceremony we had the dancers—this was college—with the feathers and it was a wonderful moment because it felt I belonged!!! In California too!

Amy—Participant 4

Amy shared about her artifact (see Figure 7) when she said:

> So, it was every year around Easter that my grandma would always send us like *un cantarrito*, *una jicara*. So, if you want water, like, "Oh, you can go and get the jicara," or "You can go get the cantarrito." Like that wasn't something. . . . Other people be like, "what do you need that for?" I'm like, "Oh, that was just to drink water." Or "That's just for this." But it wasn't something that I would take to school unless it was like, kind of like a show and tell type of thing. Then I will be like, "Oh, you know, we use this to drink. You drink water from this one."

Figure 7

Amy's Jicara

Amy's family came from a small town near Puebla, Mexico. This town has a small plaza that divides two sides—one her mother was from and the other where her dad was from. As a young girl, she was part of the dance group and they wore "shells on their feet that were like bells". The town would have reenactments from when the natives defeated the colonizers, and they would speak the native language. Even though she did not completely remember the language, Amy recalled the dancers and movements.

Amy remembered stories from her family about how the town was divided in two, only connected by the town square where her parents met. When her father passed away, both sides came together and lit up candles and made bread to share during the night. The children were dressed as angels and people visited with gifts. She said:

So what you do is that everybody that knew you comes to your house, and they bring a candle, and they bring a piece of *pan muerto*. You watch them and they're happy you came and they're, they're there for you . . . and they bring two large candles up in the front. So those candles are there, and the next day taken into the cemetery, and they are burned throughout the day. And they say that the bread that people bring you and the candles that you receive are what the dead use to see and eat. So, from here you are going on to a better life. So, on your journey you have the *pan muerto* that they have brought you and you have the candles that they have brought you to light your way until you get to your destination.

Although there was a tinge of sadness in her voice, Amy continued:

I went back for that time and it was just completely different, you know, on what we are used to here [in the United States]. It was very heartwarming to see that a lot of people love my dad. Like we had this huge table of just so much bread and candles and the thing about there is the candles are like you can buy them or you can make them. It's not like your regular candle. These are decorated wax colors like they were really beautiful. I felt bad that I couldn't bring back any with me because you're not allowed to put them on the plane. But it was just heartwarming. Like even thinking about it. I'm like, you know, like, my dad, a lot of people loved him.

Data Collection

In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021) critiqued empiricism and scientific colonialism due to its procedural problems of methods and measuring. Scientific colonialism leaves researchers to use non-Indigenous concepts, ideas, and perspectives

to study the Indigenous (Safir & Dungan, 2021). This "outsider research" (Smith, 2012, p. 44) could be mistaken for Western thought of objectivity and pride itself on its scientific methodology. As established previously, interviews and artifacts as methods avoid the pitfalls of Smith's (2012) "outsider researcher" because both require relationship. As Wilson (2008) described, Indigenous research is the "holistic use and transmission of information" (p. 32). This Indigenous research considers Indigenous ontology, epistemology, and axiology to establish a set of beliefs and ways of knowing. Both interviews and artifacts are means to understanding, relationship building, and relational accountability and should be looked as "strategies of inquiry" because changes or adaptations are allowed (Wilson, 2008, p. 40).

For this exploratory study, qualitative data were gathered using Seidman's (2019) three-interview series method. This research design has been used with Indigenous communities in the past (Cleary & Peacock, 1997). In addition, interview data were combined with a collection of artifacts to verify the verbal and elicit additional and different information to better understand the participant's experience (Irving, 2021).

Interviews

Seidman's (2019) model comprises three semistructured in-depth interviews, each separate and building upon the other. This three-interview method places the participant in a shared life history, where the past and present meet. The first interview provides the participants an opportunity to give context to their story, the second interview allows the participant to reconstruct their current standpoint and experience, and the third interview encourages the participants to share the meaning of their current role.

The interviews in the current study could have been in-person or virtual, depending on the participant's location and preference. Participants chose the space to allow them to feel as comfortable as possible during the interviews. There should have been little constraint and an increase in the sense of confidentiality. In addition, the interview was transcribed via virtual recording transcripts or through a third party. Programming such as Otterai was used to support transcribing. Each interview had time in between to allow for reflection but not too much time to lose the connection.

In between interviews, participants had access to me as the researcher via text to allow for an opportunity for a relationship to be formed. Sample questions were sent ahead of time for each interview to allow as much transparency and trust to develop. As mentioned, each interview had a specific focus point, as shown in Table 3. The first interview allowed the participant to share their relevant journey up to the moment of study. In this case, I was interested to hear their story of how they became Indigenous Head Start educators in the first place. The second interview aimed to understand the standpoint of their current experience. This was the "yet-to-be-reflected" experience of their day-to-day (Seidman, 2019). Lastly, the third interview aimed to engage participants in critical reflection. Also, it served as a member-checking opportunity where themes and meanings could be communicated between the researcher and the participant. Member checking contributes to the trustworthiness and credibility of each participant's story (Seidman, 2019).

Table 3

Interview Protocol

Interview	Time	Objective	Possible focus
Interview 1: Focused life history	45 min – 1 hr	The objective is to put participants experience in context with their current reality. The focus is on life history and to reconstruct their experience and narrate their story up until the current moment.	How did you know you wanted to be an early childhood educator? What are the past experiences that you've had with early childhood education? What are the past experiences that have led you to identify as indigenous? How did you end up being a Teacher in Head Start?
Interview 2: The details of lived experiences	45 min – 1 hr	The objective is to reconstruct the present lived experience as an Indigenous Head Start teacher. This is the "yet-to-be-reflected- upon" experience.	What is it like to wake up in the morning and go teach? Tell me the type of relationships you have with the students? Reconstruct the day between wake up, work, and back to bed.
Interview 3: Reflection on the meaning	45 min – 1 hr	The objective of the third interview is to search for meaning, discovering "the extraordinary" from the lived experience. A time to reflect	Thinking back about what you shared, what does being an Indigenous Head Start teacher mean to you? In the past, you mentioned X, how does that play a role in your teaching?

Note: Adapted from *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, by I. Seidman, 2019, Teachers College, copyright 2019 by Teachers College Press.

Artifacts

Alongside in-depth interviews, artifacts and memory boxes served as data collection instruments in this study. Artifacts are "street data" (Safir et al., 2021, p. 62) that are difficult to quantify but offer depth in meanings and stories. This equity-centered approach yielded insight and helped answer what was not asked directly in the interview. This approach centered the voices of the teachers by allowing them to tell a complete story around the artifact. The participants were asked to describe the choice and content of the artifact to understand their knowledge further—this evidence aimed to amplify their ways of knowing. Facilitated self-

description of the artifacts supported their realities and was a tenant of phenomenological research (Ndame, 2023). Participants were encouraged to bring artifacts such as pictures to reflect their Indigeneity in the classroom. Qualitative research acknowledges artifacts as mirrors of values, interests, ideologies, and viewpoints, offering narratives from which interpretive insights and symbolic representations can be gleaned (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). Artifacts were observed and documented in this study, focusing on items that hold specific significance for the participants.

Memory boxes, which contain items that evoke memories of significant moments, people, and events, offer a wealth of reminiscences and represent an "archeology of memory and meaning" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 114) within a narrative context. I explored the participants' stories of identity, teaching, and learning that encompassed past, present, and future, as they presented a valuable source of memory boxes from which stories of people and events can be recounted and incorporated into research texts. Memory boxes allowed participants to make meaning of their teaching by passing on the wisdom they have brought in the classroom. Both artifacts and memory boxes disclosed essential information about participants' experiences and interpretations.

The artifacts incorporated a future perspective into memory work. This approach was based on a research study where young Indigenous individuals from Kalaallit Nunaat (i.e., Greenland) were asked to create future memories for upcoming generations by developing memory texts that represent what they believe is worth preserving (Chahine, 2022). In my research, I used the future to emphasize the present alongside the past, and to inform recommendations for policy and practice.

Data Analysis

Data preparation and analysis began with a holistic mindset as a nod to Indigenous epistemology where relationality and well-being are the ultimate goals (Safir & Dungan, 2021). Indigenous data analysis focuses on harmony where "things are together—they are linked; making a connection in this way allows for growth and positive change to take place" (Wilson, 2008, p. 109). Unlike Westernized and Eurocentric data analysis mostly linear, hierarchal, and based on neutrality, Indigenous ways of knowing are nonlinear, cyclical, and in relation to one another. Therefore, though this process may read as "one-step-leads-to-another" (Wilson, 2008, p. 116), it was interwoven analysis throughout led by "whole lifelong learning leading to an intuitive logic and way of analysis" (Wilson, 2008, p. 116). Conversations and inquiry took place with my doctoral chair throughout, where we sat with and held the information the teachers provided. Life and death and the seasons between all took place and were woven throughout, compiled into one document.

First, interviews were recorded and transcribed using online platforms such as Zoom (www.zoom.us) and Otterai (www.otter.ai). Participants had the option to meet in person or online. Similarly, if participants chose the online option, they could also choose to be on camera or not. The three interviews for each participant were compiled into one document for each participant. Though the occasional filler words such as "um" and "like" were omitted in the transcripts, they usually denoted body language, head nods, and eye contact and were kept for analysis. Participants were assigned fictitious names, and identifiers such as names and locations were replaced or removed.

Second, I examined the narratives using thematic analysis and threads and themes through repetitive reviews of original transcripts and artifacts. Using IST (Foley, 2003) and its tenets as the initial themes, I began to manually highlight words or phrases participants used. Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data, such as interviews, focus group transcripts, or open-ended survey responses, to identify common themes or patterns in the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach is commonly used in the social sciences and involves carefully reading and coding the data to identify and categorize themes or ideas.

Third, I reread the interviews and continued to code manually. I then organized the themes into an Excel spreadsheet based on four themes that answered the research questions. These four themes—Japanangka Paradigm, Human World, Sacred World, and Physical World—contained full sections of the interviews. As I reread and organized the transcripts into categories, these themes generated memories and stories from Indigenous scholars and ways of knowing. This process was a form of hauntology in which "non-material is not necessarily immaterial" and acts like "musical fugues, where phrases are repeated, overlapping, woven together into a more complex sequence" (Yoon & Chen, 2022, p. 79). These themes became the threads and stories that eventually led to the tapestry of this study. From these themes, I concluded and made recommendations. I completed member checking to confirm noted threads and themes to acknowledge Indigenous ways of knowing and traditional knowledge systems.

In recognition of the sanctity of storytelling in Indigenous communities, I also considered during data analysis the potential for some stories to produce more harm than benefits. As a study using IST (Foley, 2003) and aiming to facilitate the expression of marginalized voices in genuine and authentic ways, I paid particular attention to the research's integrity and

understanding of ethics and community sensibility. Data analysis focused on the joys and strengths of the participants because, as established marginalized populations, people in the Indigenous and early childhood community may have far too often been exposed to unethical research (Smith, 2021).

My analysis in this study adds to the growing body of research on Indigenous teaching and knowing. IST provides the equity and authority to search for connecting "threads and patterns" (Seidman, 2019, p. 133). It is a theory rather than divorced from practice, requiring the practitioner to "bring their own experiences, perspectives, and critiques and, in particular, the lens of self-conscious reflection about their own identities and practices" (Hornberger, 2014, p. 290).

Validity and Trustworthiness

Regarding the validity of the data-gathering process, Creswell & Poth (2018) recommended corroborating evidence using specific procedures to ensure perspectives can be translated authentically into practice. This research was not meant to be reduced to a single practice; rather, it was meant to "promote transformative action in pursuit of social justice for Indigenous Peoples in academic settings [including] valuing and validating of our own knowledge systems" (Q'um Q'um Xiiem et al., 2019, p. 7). The strategies used to increase credibility and consistency—due to this critical paradigm—included member checking throughout the process and at the end of the analysis, researcher reflexivity, collaboration with participants, and peer debriefing.

I had conversations with participants to ensure accurate representations. Teachers were active participants during the interview process, meaning, they were equal collaborators and

were able to ask their own questions, determine how long the interview went, or the setting the interview would take place.

In addition, I increased reliability by offering this research to my own Indigenous community, "who will often sanction the integrity and credibility of the story using their own measures" (Q'um Q'um Xiiem et al., 2019, p. 7). I remained accountable to the collective by using IST, a methodology created for Indigenous research (Foley, 2003). Considering evidence that did not "fit the pattern" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261), I acknowledged the evidence as points of intrigue discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. I included direct quotes, artifacts, and detailed presentations of settings and findings in the analysis. I took careful, respectful, and reverent time in my discussion and analysis and presented the results to colleagues to increase the spirit of interrater reliability. By engaging in reflexivity and acknowledging transferability, I continually clarified I was an Indigenous researcher who incorporated an Indigenous research paradigm to illuminate Indigenous teachers' ways of knowing and pedagogy in the Head Start classroom.

CHAPTER 4

WEAVING THE THREADS

> Well, it means that I belong here. It means that there's nobody else like me or you, but we all have the same connections. I think coming back to the land, coming back to generations gone by, experiences that we suffer, good and bad. Being Indigenous is all of that. . . . And we belong here. And there's so much to learn about our ancestors in our past, and the more you know about them, the stronger your spirit is. And it's not just food. It's not just the land. It's a spiritual thing. It's like a spiritual journey that you actually get to go when you start discovering your roots. And how much worth they have.–Stevie

Behind every huipil and textile project is a messiness of thread. Loose pieces in a sort of unfinished crossovers and bunches that show all the colors used but do not yet tell the story. This chapter focuses on answering the first research question, or in other words, making sense of the threads through storytelling: how Indigenous teachers describe, experience, and make meaning of the educational pedagogy in Head Start spaces in Southern California Indigenous regions. Using Indigenous standpoint theory (IST; Foley, 2003) as a thematic and deductive coding tool, each theme is broken down with an example of how teachers *described* aid theme, an *experience* or story behind it, and the beginnings of analysis that makes *meaning* of their pedagogy.

The structure of this chapter is aligned with the IST (Foley, 2003), the loom that sets this tapestry. At its center is the Japanangka Paradigm, followed by the triangulation of the Physical, the Human, and the Sacred World. They are parts necessary to create the intricate pattern, like

the cord tied to the tree, the end bar, the shed rod, the needle, and the backstrap. In isolation, neither the end bar nor the backstrap are capable of weaving the story alone but must respect each other.

As my artifact for the study, I submitted photographs of weavers from the unceded territory of the Kaqchikel Maya, currently known as Guatemala (see Figure 8). These women are my elders and kin, weaving cinchos and tapestries on the looms. Each loom is adapted to the tapestry being made while maintaining the same structure. The end bars, needles, and back strap all have to be in the right place for the loom to function appropriately, in harmony and relationality.

Figure 8

Mayan Women Weaving on Looms

Similarly, in this chapter, each theme is organized so each point of IST (Foley, 2003) has harmony and relational accountability. Readers be warned, Indigenous knowledge cannot be pulled away from the land, relationships, and spirit. It also cannot be fragmented, less it be used as a colonizer assimilation tool. To completely separate and pull apart would be to void each tenet of its special relationship with one another, stripping it of its fluidity and dynamism

(Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015). Meaning a loom and thread cannot be pulled away and expected to function. Therefore, the organization of this chapter is for a reader to trust the loom and threads as we weave the story.

The Japanangka Paradigm

The Japanangka Paradigm lies at the center of the IST, similar to how the end bars hold the tensions of the loom. Foley (2003) explained, "The paradigm is the connections of life, birth, and death that engulfs the spiritual and material matter" (p. 47). The model represents the Indigenous experience encompassing who we are as collectively complex and whole, hard work and easiness, combative and friendly, and back again. It is a cycle from child to student to elder and to spirit and everything that embraces it.

Essentially, the following narratives weave together personal experiences with broader themes of identity, resilience, and intergenerational continuity. They underscore the importance of cultural heritage as a source of strength and identity, the challenges posed by assimilation pressures, and the profound connections that Indigenous peoples maintain with their past, present, and future. Beginning the analysis with the paradigm sets the tone; the Human, the Physical, and the Sacred are interconnected and part of the cycle. Even though the findings are presented separately, they are not independent. The Japanangka paradigm is holistic understanding, all connected and part of the cycle, setting the right tension to begin weaving.

Stevie began explaining the cycle by sharing an anecdote of joy, hard work, and growth in the classroom through her relationships with the students. Stevie stated:

> I get excited about that. Because the language is coming through there, they're becoming. They're becoming. I love that. They're becoming awesome. They're becoming talkers.

> They're becoming independent and dependent. They're becoming leaders. I mean, now the things they say, it's all sassy. [Laughs] No, not as much. No, no, they're not. I defend them. *Tampoco*. [Laughter] That's the Indigenous coming through. This silliness, the silliness. That's part of us. That's, I mean, it's true, right? Because they're in my house. They're awesome. But they're also a lot of hard work. They are a lot of hard work. Yes. hours and hours and hours of hard work.

For Amy, she experienced the completeness of the model in the classroom after a child hit her. As an early childhood educator, Amy was trained to know behavior is communication and hitting can be considered developmentally appropriate and does not necessarily need a direct consequence. At the same time, as an Indigenous teacher, Amy has participated in the beginnings of restorative justice by allowing the hurt and the hurter to find a sense of peace. Amy stated:

> If you go through life, thinking about all this negativity and how people are bad, how are you going to notice the good that is out there? When you're so focused on that area? So I'm always gonna be like, the children, you know, they're awesome. I'm always kind of positive and always see them in a positive way. And, yes, sometimes we might have our situations where we had a moment, and they might have hit you. And I'm not saying it was intentional, because sometimes that's just their way of trying to get attention. And I'm like, okay, and then we'll talk about it afterwards. And I feel like I kind of took it. I talked to someone [a teacher], a while back, that when a child will hit you. And you know, but she [the child] wants to apologize, genuinely wants to apologize. And I'm like, No, it's okay. She's like, No, it's not okay. She wants to take responsibility for what she

did. And she genuinely wants to apologize. So don't take that away from her if she says she's sorry. And if she is apologizing then I can be there and tell her, I forgive you.

This cycle, from perpetrator to healer to healed, required actions and interactions from all parties. The Japanangka paradigm enmeshes the spiritual (teacher and child) and material (teacher actions and child actions), offering a sort of plurality and fluidity with "a comfortable awareness of the limits of its knowledge" (Koomen, 2020, p. 48).

The contentment with ambiguity establishes a sort of journey toward a horizon, always there but never fully realized. As an example, for these teachers, being Indigenous in the classroom included coming to terms with their identity journey and how it shows up. This experience was not linear, organized, or neat. Instead, there was an awakening of a sort, an acknowledgment of not knowing, and a sense of still growing while being grateful to the elders past. For Stevie, the holistic experience came from her embracing and reclaiming her Indigenous identity. She told the story of the reaction she received from her community and her journey in identifying as an Indigenous educator. Stevie stated:

> You know it's funny because I let my friend know that I was doing this and one of my other friends, she started making fun of me. She sent me, you know, those little pictures, GIFs? Yeah. Of some Native Americans dancing around. And you know, I took it with stride, like, okay, haha, funny. But it made me think.
>
> You know what, many years ago, I don't think I would have considered myself Indigenous at all because, to me, Indigenous meant like some poor little Indian, just like what she said, some native person out in the middle of nowhere—that's Indigenous, but

it's not. We are Indigenous because we belong here in this land. I mean, I didn't cross an ocean to get here. I didn't even cross the river to get here. We were here.

I think that being Indigenous changes every year. As the demographics change, I think we are now allowed a little more to be who we are. And I'm happy about that. To claim my roots and to be proud of who we are. I know that a lot of people had to fight for that right when I was a kid, so I'm very happy about that. And I'm very grateful that people actually protested, marched to make my life better in the year 2023.

In this statement, Stevie connected her current reality and how it connected to those who came before her. Stevie was both a recipient and a giver in this paradigm, in both being victimized (teased by a friend) and being a protector ("To claim my roots and to be proud of who we are"). Indigenous scholars have phrased the holistic relationship as "a tolerance for ambiguity, learning to operate in a 'pluralistic' mode, where nothing is abandoned as hopeless" (Persky & Viruru, 2015, p. 133).

Similarly, Amy, Rose, and Estrella found hope in the finished cycle of "connections of life, birth, and death that engulfs the spiritual and material matter" by discussing how our Indigenous identity lives beyond us, in our children (Foley, 2003, p. 47). Amy's and Rose's experiences of passing cultural practices and understandings onto the next generation, whether they are their children or students, is an example of cultural continuity and education. This perspective is rooted in a deep connection to the land, ancestry, and community, suggesting that Indigenous identity is not confined to the individual but is a collective and interconnected experience. Amy said:

> A lot of people don't celebrate the same things. They don't come from the same places. So it's just interesting to see that. I never really thought, like, hey, you know, being different and practicing all these things make us who we are. And even my children say, "But my classmates don't do that." I'm like, "Yeah, but we're not your classmates." Remember, that's one of the things that I always tell them when they're like, "Oh, but they do it, or they don't do it." And I'm like, "Yes. But we are not them. And they are not us. So, this is what we are going to practice. And this is how we're going to do it." And they're like, "Okay."

Rose also reflected similar thoughts. Rose stated:

> I had to think back and I was thinking, when I was a child, and then I was seeing myself now in the classroom. So that was very meaningful because now, the children that I have in the classroom, I feel that once I was that little girl, but now I'm on the other side of the story, and I'm their teacher.

Estrella brought up how losing the Indigenous identity in the classroom results in a loss, not only for herself but also for the children. Estrella stated:

> From my point of view, being Americanized, I believe that it will be a negative way because you're losing something that makes you, you. And we're just not passing that on with our kids. And even I see it with my own family, right. We're shaping the minds of the littles, of these little kids that we work with. It can be, well, I don't want to say negative, right? But yeah, it can be in a positive way. It can be in a negative way.

It was unnecessary to probe if the teachers meant *children* as students or blood-related offspring because the Japanangka paradigm does not require a clear definition. Children are both ours and

not ours, existing in the physical and spiritual space. There is a tolerance for ambiguity. Indigenous teachers embrace the unknown—a level of comfort with the undefined. The teachers made meaning of their identity by recognizing they had an established purpose for the next generation. The teachers pushed back on the construct. There is no needed separation between teacher and student, mother and child, or the next Indigenous and non-Indigenous generations.

Ambiguity is central to holism and therefore placed at the forefront of the data analysis. Ambiguity suggests a comfort with not having all the answers and embracing the complexity of identity and cultural belonging. This approach allows for a more fluid and inclusive understanding of identity, where distinctions between self and other, teacher and student, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are less rigid. The creator of the tapestry knows where and how the art will look like once finished, until then, we as onlookers must embrace holistic ambiguity.

The Physical World

The Physical World in IST represents people's relationship to the land and nature—instead of us owning the land, the land owns us (Foley, 2003; Koomen, 2020). In our loom analogy, the cord is tied against the tree—dependent so much the tree might as well be included as part of the loom. The Indigenous relationship with nature includes more than posthumanism; it is an approach showing nature lives within us and has always been that way. Indigenous teachers articulate a profound connection with nature that permeates both their personal identity and their pedagogical approaches. The findings revealed these educators did not merely view nature as an external entity to be studied or observed; instead, they described and experienced nature as an integral part of their being.

Defining the Physical

The discourse the teachers presented around nature included defining the role land and nature play in the classroom. The teachers expanded on their experiences and began making meaning of how their pedagogy and ways of knowing impact the classroom.

Teachers defined the Physical world as being compatible with their home and childhood. Stevie stated, "[The planter] is bright and beautiful." Stevie's classroom reminded her of childhood. Stevie described:

> I think because, you know, part of my heritage was always planting stuff and growing things. I like that. So, having natural plants all around me is very soothing to me. And I'm very proud of all the plants that we have out there. And in the classroom.

Rose also shared:

> When I was a child, I used to be in the park all the time, no video games. It was just a park and I just saw that when I was getting older, many many of my classmates didn't really pay enough or much attention to nature and animals in general, so I always try to connect nature with animals and how we're all connected. We need to take care of it.

Experiencing the Physical

This intrinsic bond with the natural world was reflected in the teachers' teaching methodologies, where they actively strove to bridge the gap often found in conventional curriculums that treat nature as separate from the self. By integrating nature into their lessons, they challenged and expanded traditional educational narratives, fostering a more holistic and interconnected understanding of the Physical world among their students. Recollection of a childhood home began to place the Physical presence in the occupied territory of Head Start

classrooms because teachers brought nature *within* them. The Head Start curriculum places wild nature against civilized culture and establishes a linear binary for the sake of civility and safety (Nxumalo, 2019). For example, the Tree Study from the curriculum has an objective to begin exploring trees (Berke et al., 2016).

Through guided investigations, the classroom curriculum aims to answer questions such as "What are the characteristics of trees in our community?" and "What can we do with parts of trees?" The mandated curriculum requires the classroom to see a tree with a "colonial gaze," or as a romantic object that should be analyzed and interacted with but only to the colonizer's comfort (Clark, 2015, p. 119). Unfortunately, as previous research has shown, Indigenous teachers are left "reweaving" curriculum practices with their own to carry the Physical world to the children (Henward et al., 2019). Rose shared a story of how she needed to expand on what the curriculum offered. Rose stated:

> I would say, I mean, at work, we have been trained for a lot of workshops and a lot of things, but one of the things that I incorporate that I feel like, I just do it because I think it's important. And it's interesting, and it's part of everyday life. I talk a lot about nature and the environment, and how to take care of the environment and nature, and any chance I get, I'm always mentioning of taking care of the planet Earth. . . . And always, *always,* keep trying to bring the focus with animals—to be gentle with animals and respect animals and nature. I mean, that's something I bring into the classroom, but I haven't been trained specifically in that area, but it's something that I think is important, so I try to mention it whenever I get a chance.

> For example, last week, we were talking about trees. Well, that gave me a chance to talk a lot about the environment and nature. That was it. They [the children] were surprised. They were surprised because [the tree study] was not really related. I'm like, "Where do we live in?" I showed them the planet [on my phone], you know? Like, we live on planet Earth. So I started talking about my mother nature. And then it was very interesting because they were like, later during the day, they were like, "We live on planet Earth!" I thought that was really, really interesting. "We live, we live on planet Earth!"

Perhaps Rose found it interesting children were outside yelling, "We live on planet Earth!" because rather than reciting details about the three trees planted in the classroom playground or what they saw on their way to school, they were talking about something so nontangible or not developmentally appropriate, in Euro-Western terms, as the planet Earth. According to the required curriculum, nontangible means something students cannot readily explore or apply to their lives. The curriculum guide claims children learn best from "in-depth investigation of worthy topics" (Helm & Katz, 2016, p. 136). Teaching Strategies (2020) presented:

> What makes a good topic? What makes wheels a better topic than dinosaurs? What makes boxes better than planets? In a nutshell, a good study excites the children in your group and *has enough aspects that can be investigated and explored.* (p. 137)

By bringing the Physical world in, Rose began to Indigenize the classroom experience via displaying the sacredness with nature as a bond to be nurtured, rather than merely investigated. This intrinsic bond with the natural world was reflected in her teaching methodologies, where

she actively strove to bridge the gap often found in conventional curriculums that treat nature as separate from the self.

When Rose said the tree study was "not really related" to discussions of the planet Earth, it was because it is not one of the questions to be answered in the Tree Study according to the curriculum. Later in the interviews, Rose again noted the required study and modified it with the intent to return to the Physical. Rose stated:

> The closest study that I see in the curriculum is probably recycling. So I'll probably be using that one so I can talk more about the environment. Another one will be trees. We talked about that one. And I was very surprised because when I was asking them, 'Where do apples come from?' A lot of them said the market, in the supermarket. So then we started talking about trees again and all that nature and the environment, where they grow. And it was it was very nice to talk about the environment and all that.

Similar to Rose's story, Estrella also found ways to modify the curriculum requirements of the breathing and connection activities. Estrella stated:

> I mean, we could do our breathing standing up [not always be sitting down]. We could do our connections standing up there [on the circle time carpet]. It would still require us to move and like use those different songs. . . . It doesn't have to be like something extreme. Like I said, we have [the activity] Jump the River, and not everybody has to run. It could be something so small, you know, like I just wanted to move around, not necessarily run around.
>
> So, my previous coteacher was the complete opposite. She's like, "No, they have to be sitting down, we're gonna do this, we're gonna do that." I'm like, "okay, let's do

> your children that are willing and want to listen." And then, for the ones that are having a hard time, we can provide something else. We can either be sitting down, or they could be standing up. There would be times when we needed to step outside; I'd be like, "Oh, you know, I'm going to take someone, and we're gonna go for a walk around outside."

Rose's and Estrella's curriculum modifications were not an articulate rejection of required curriculums but strategic reformulations of how the Physical establishes itself in Head Start spaces. The Indigenous teachers use inherent knowledge of the Physical—the land is in our being, and us in it—to make meaning of their pedagogy. By showing the planet Earth on her phone, Rose began a conversation of the role humans and nature play in the larger place and time. Estrella uses her knowledge of breathing so children could experience the Physical in different spaces. Their approach to learning about the Physical is to become active participants, in relationship with their children, parallel to the intrinsic bond we share with nature.

Weaving the Physical

Rose made the classroom active participants through whole-body practice. She said, "Also, yoga activities. We do the [curriculum-required] breathing, but I like to do yoga with them." Moving beyond deep belly breathing, a holistic approach of breathing with the whole body became an experience available to the children due to Rose's Indigenous methodology. Estrella expressed the Physical through advocacy for children. Estrella stated:

> But even though if they've already been there for months, they still can't keep their bodies still. So it's just kind of like modifying it [the curriculum] to making it more joyful for them as well. And also, I guess, recently, I've been seeing a lot of videos where

they talk about how the education system is just not doing justice for the children because we're there and just sitting in school right there inside a place.

We, they, tend to label the child because he's too active, he has ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder], or because this child has this and we're not letting them explore, move, and be who they are or adapting to the need, so we label. So instead of just labeling the child, "Oh, he has ADHD. He needs to calm him down," stuff like that. No, it's like, find something that's gonna help this child with the energy that he has. Be more exposed to nature, be more outside; anything, he needs more love. Using his body outside, right? So, I feel that's where we kind of like also lack in our environments.

The universal understanding of these Indigenous teachers is not found in the non-American Indian Alaskan Native Head Start classroom. This understanding is Indigeneity—"A distinct way of viewing the world and of 'being'" (Wilson, 2008, p. 15). Instead of knowing we are part of the Physical, children are labeled "good" or "bad" by being "too active" or by having ADHD. Estrella pushed back by modifying the classroom, making it "more joyful for them," and providing a sense of "justice" by being "exposed to nature" and to "be more outside;" in essence, Estrella advocated for "more love" for the child by dismantling Euro-Western curriculum and returning the child to the Physical.

The Sacred World

IST explicitly labels the Sacred world and works as an invitation to engage with the spirit and morality. Morality means the spiritual laws for healing and care Indigenous people have toward themselves and others. It is not entirely metaphysical; rather, its focus also includes healing and well-being of all creatures, care of the country, and retention of the lore, story work

(Foley, 2003). In the loom parable, the Sacred world can be seen as the back strap setting the tension. It can be uncomfortable to have a strap around your waist. Yet, this piece is crucial because it provides the tautness often overlooked, ignored, or buried in Euro-Westernized cultures. The backstrap represents laws of shared power and tension between space and gravity and requires a balance and fit that is just right. It is also supportive and healing, similar to how we care for Indigenous self and others.

The colonizer claims a right to comfort and power hoarding for oneself (Okun, 2021). The Sacred world recognizes the relationship with the more-than-human and acknowledges the rule and power that reigns us. It is "a persistent aspect of humanity and a means for shaping an intersubjective moral universe to govern how people relate to one another" (Koomen, 2020, p. 47). It is a way of knowing and management, passed down by clans and stories, that guide interaction and set expectations (Foley, 2003). If one pulls too tight on the backstrap, the fabric snaps, but the spaciousness of the yarn cannot be organized if they do not pull enough. Similarly, the alliance with the Sacred is not fixed but cannot be ignored or demanded. The Sacred world is "the space where human and more-than-human create a connection, a bond, that is true and real" (Field, 2022, p. 128).

Experiencing the Sacred

Indigenous teachers experienced encounters with the Sacred by building an accord, regardless of the circumstances surrounding the day. The accord is a relationality with the more-than-human, more than mere acknowledgment; it is an action "rather than viewing ourselves as being *in* relationship with other people or things, we *are* the relationship that we hold and are a part of" (Wilson, 2008, p. 80). When asked to describe her day, Estrella began to talk about the

moments before she made it to her work site. She experienced the Sacred through musical practice and self-talk on the 10-minute drive she had after dropping off her kids. Estrella stated:

> When I'm feeling any way, I can just have the radio off and just be on silent. For me to just get my thoughts going and just be okay. It depends on how I'm feeling—workout music, or whatever type of music I have. I feel like driving is my time. And that's what I enjoy the most. If I'm feeling like, Okay, I got this, I wake up in a good mood and everything's gonna go well, then I have music on. If I feel that I just need that time of quiet time, like, get myself together again. And I think all those affirmations: It's gonna be okay. I got it. That's when I have the music for that.

Similarly, Amy acknowledged the sacred wisdom within her to build intentionality and purpose around a child she had in her classroom. In this conversation, Amy discussed a particular child having difficulty regulating emotions, connecting with others, and following routines. Sometimes, the child would be aggressive toward her and others, making it difficult to establish and keep positive relationships. Amy recalled exchanging with the Sacred to get her through that time. Amy said:

> I would give myself little scenarios or pep talks of how our previous week or previous days have gone and what were triggers for certain children. I'm like, to myself, we want to avoid this, or we want to make sure that we are able to support him or her in this. And a lot of the times, it's not the same thing. It's a different experience. Every day, it's not like, the exact same thing is going to happen where I know how to solve it. It's like, okay, how are we going to work to make sure that all our children are getting all the attention?

> Intentionality is in your core. You have to be like, "This is what we're going to try to accomplish." It doesn't matter how we get there. But like, what are we doing to try? What are we doing to make sure that we get to that goal? That's something that, you know, I'm a little sad right now just thinking about him because he's grown so much and I know he's gonna be okay.

When Amy called to the "intentionality," it was a nod to the "little scenarios or pep talks" she has had with the Sacred. The Sacred world guides interactions and sets expectations on how we are to be with others. Its focus is "less on the various power dynamics that might shape or constrain relations" (Blockett et al., 2022, p. 52) and more on the accountability and obligations she has been given for how to be *with* the past, present, and future (Jones, 2019). By experiencing the Sacred in their morning drive, Amy and Estrella fulfilled the spiritual laws for healing and care Indigenous people have toward themselves and others.

The guidance from the Sacred is less concerned with the hierarchies or constraints that may exist within human interactions and more concerned with fulfilling the continuity and well-being of life across time: to ancestors (past), the current community (present), and future generations (future).

This integration of the Sacred into everyday moments underscores a holistic view of existence in Indigenous cultures. It is a perspective where every action, thought, and intention is interconnected with a larger cosmic order, where humans, nature, and the spiritual realm are inextricably linked. The Sacred, therefore, is not just a distant or abstract concept but a way of being in the case of these teachers, fosters a sense of responsibility and care transcending individual existence.

Weaving the Sacred

The omission of the Sacred in Euro-Westernized curriculum has created "occlusion and silences" in pedagogical practices and Indigenous ways of knowing (Nxumalo, 2019, p. 45). Indigenous teachers, therefore, take everyday encounters to refigure the presence of the more-than-human. Estrella said, "If you can modify [the curriculum] to incorporate different beliefs, different cultures, then it is doable. Instead of saying, 'No, we're just not doing that at all.'"

The weavings are intentional, some more visible than others. Because Indigenous teachers bring the Sacred *within* them, they modify the curriculum when it is lacking. Classroom strategies to improve children's Sacred experience are created to compensate for the failure of policies designed without the Indigenous voice. As Henward et al. (2019) stated, "The multistep process in which these curriculums were digested and changed must be seen for what it is, an undertaking that requires substantial work on the backs of Indigenous women" (p. 51).

For example, Stevie experienced the more-than-human Sacred world in the colder fall months. She took moments to emphasize the relationship between energy and spirit. Stevie stated:

> They [the children] keep my spirit young. And around this time, I feel like one of the Sanderson Sisters, you know, how they suck the essence out of the kids, and they keep themselves young. I think that's me every day. I'm like [makes sucking noise]. Alright, let's go guys! You know, I don't complain about aches and pains even though I feel them. But I think these kids actually keep me young.

The Sanderson Sisters was a reference to Walt Disney's movie *Hocus Pocus*, in which a trio of witches were revived in modern-day early 1990s Salem, Massachusetts, and, to get revenge,

create a potion to consume the life force of children (Ortega, 1993). Acknowledging this "life force" was a form of acknowledging the Sacred within the Head Start classroom. The children did not themselves experience "soul-sucking;" however, they were active participants in sharing their more-than-human spirit. By acknowledging the Sacred within the children, Stevie regained her strength.

Rose also helped children experience this "life force" through a molinillo, a frothing tool used in Mesoamerican Indigenous cultures to prepare chocolate drinks. Rose brought the molinillo as an artifact that reminded her of her Indigeneity in the Head Start classroom. She recalled how she used the molinillo at home and in the school environment. Using this tool was more than the tangible preparation of hot chocolate; it was also a time filled with memories, superstitions, and cultural life lessons. Rose described:

> In the classroom, since I can't use chocolate, I only use water and a little bit of soap, so I let them create the bubbles. That's usually what happens with hot chocolate. It doesn't create the bubbles, but it creates that little foamy layer on top. So with them I use water and a little bit of soap and food coloring. I talked about what it is. They have never seen one. They were like, 'What is this teacher?' So I explained what it was. So molinillo, that's the name of the tool. It's made out of wood. And actually, it has, around the wood, it has, I want to say, not images, but it's an engraved design. It has a very nice design around the rings that spin.
>
> It's not mine. It's my mom's. That's why she's like, "Don't lose it." I'm like, No, I'll keep it in the closet because we have two. The one that we have here at the house is a

little bit.. It's been with us for a long time, and I have one at school. She bought it somewhere.

I feel that we can make a big difference as teachers. We can make a big difference with each child in different ways. And we can even, for example, the curriculum we follow has certain things that we have to expose them to. I think we can also expose them to other things outside of the curriculum. Yeah, well, that are age appropriate. Like, for example, the environment. Well, the planet or the themes or studies that are not in the curriculum, we can always connect it. But there's more things that we can share with them. For example, a molinillo or stuff like that, little things like that, that we can share with them. That is not in the curriculum. It's more like culture and *cultural.*

The more we have, the more items and artifacts we have, the more we can share with our children and talk about it and expose them to all of that because there's many items that they don't know what they are for. By having all these artifacts, it probably, you know, open up another area of interest.

Rose used the molinillo, in this case, as more than a tool to make bubbles; it was a tool to share culture and *cultural* lessons often shared in Indigenous families. Sharing this wisdom was an opening to experiencing the Sacred because there are many ways to make bubbles. How does sharing this wisdom about culture connect to the Sacred? It is an opening to "rememory through storywork" (Q'um Q'um Xiiem et al., 2019, p. 1). The connection to her mother, the warning to "not lose it," and even the engraved design serve as a reminder guiding how Indigenous people interact with one another and set expectations.

The molinillo inhibits both ghosts and hauntings of stories that exist because they need to exist. They are "reappearances of feelings and violence that were presumed or desperately hoped to have been left behind" (Yoon & Chen, 2022, p. 81). Why bring the molinillo, whose sole practical purpose is to make hot chocolate, when chocolate is not allowed in Head Start classrooms? This practice connects with the more-than-human spirits as an act of rememory. Rememory is storytelling – stories that "ghosts need told in their quest for justice—memories that have been silenced or erased or foreclosed and never imagined – and elevates them alongside the stories that have been circulating" (Yoon & Chen, 2022, p. 81).

When Rose talked about children experiencing the culture and *cultural*, she meant experiencing the Sacred—the unspoken, but clearly, ways of being and knowing. What children were experiencing with water and food coloring was a recall of how Mesoamerican Indigenous families prepared their sacred rituals to the gods. It is retelling the story, recalling the memory, and acknowledging the hauntings to share what has been silenced to create a world, again, that looks to the more-than-human, transformative Sacred.

The Human World

The Human world is the relationships and identities we share with people; it is our responsibility to the Indigenous community (Foley, 2003). It is communicating and relationing with others as an avenue for "agreement-making about the future, as well as truth-telling about the past" (Koomen, 2020, p. 48). In the loom analogy, the threaded needle represents the Human world. Choosing the correct thread for the project is as important as the future project itself, and that lesson was learned and passed down from the Elders before you. The weaver becomes a part of the needle, and therefore part of the loom, and eventually the tapestry.

The threaded needle symbolizes the Human world. Just as selecting the appropriate thread is crucial for the success of a weaving project, so too is the careful consideration of our actions and decisions for the future. This wisdom, emphasizing the importance of thoughtful selection and foresight, is a legacy handed down from the Elders. As the weaver threads the needle and integrates it into the loom, they become an integral component of the weaving process, merging with the loom and, by extension, the emerging tapestry. This analogy illustrates the interconnectedness of individual actions and communal outcomes, underscoring the idea we are all contributors to our collective human experience.

Defining the Human

Indigenous teachers used the memory box to define the Human world. When asked to bring in artifacts for these memory boxes, one of the teachers brought in a little booklet of chants. Memory boxes, which contain items that evoke memories of significant moments, people, and events, offer a wealth of reminiscences and represent an "archeology of memory and meaning" within a narrative context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 114). The participants' stories of identity, teaching, and learning that encompassed past, present, and future were explored, and they presented a valuable source of stories of people and events (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Memory boxes allowed participants to make meaning of their teaching by passing on the wisdom they have brought into the classroom. With Amy's memory box, she included the booklet of chants with a recollection of wisdom shared by another teacher. Amy shared insight into why there is no dominant person in the Human—everybody can do it together. Amy stated:

> The other thing that I would want to add, and this is just like a little booklet, like a little booklet of chants and songs that I wish I knew before I even started teaching. The power of just making up a song, knowing some chant, even knowing one or two. Honestly, [singing] is just another way to communicate. And you're singing and you're playing. And without knowing, you know, you're already learning, but we're not going to move to that right now. We just want to communicate with each other in the beginning, connect with each other. And that's something that we can all do together. Something that one of my teachers said, "We can talk. We can sing together, but we can't talk together. Like one of us has to listen. But when we're singing we can all do it together at the same time."

There is no dominant person; we are all together. It is a community. For Indigenous teachers, the Human is the community they experience through singing and chanting, not necessarily through talking. It is a place with trust and mutual respect. Singing is not just an artistic or cultural activity but a manifestation of Indigenous epistemologies prioritizing relationality and the dissolution of hierarchical barriers in the classroom. Through these practices, Indigenous teachings offer profound insights into ways of learning and being together that celebrate the interconnectedness of all beings and the communal nature of learning.

Stevie also put props for dancing in her memory box. This artifact reflected her ways of knowing of the human—dancing in motion for joy and love. Stevie stated:

> The props would be for dancing. What I would like to tell [Indigenous teachers] is don't take it so seriously. These kids are 3 and 4 years old. We're not sending them to college

> . . . you know, get down to their level and just talk to them. You'll be surprised how much you learn.

Stevie's inclusion of dancing props in her memory box further expanded on connection. Dancing, like singing and chanting, is a communal activity that emphasizes the joy and love inherent in human relationships. It offers a dynamic way to engage with young children, underscoring a willingness to learn from one another in building meaningful connections. These meaningful connections can be described as Indigenous joy and were found to decrease and curb the negative effects of trauma in previous studies (Kading et al., 2015).

By focusing on these nonverbal (talking) forms of communication and interaction, Indigenous educators illustrate a comprehensive approach to teaching and learning. These practices demonstrate true understanding and connection within a community are achieved not just through words, but through shared experiences that honor the full spectrum of human expression.

In the last interview, Stevie mentioned again how respect is part of the relationship. As the sole Spanish-speaking adult in the Head Start classroom, she gravitated toward the Spanish-speaking children, even when asked to speak only English. Stevie refused. For her, the Human is displayed through words and actions of respect. She explained she built those connections when the children came through the door, greeting them in their language. Stevie stated:

> I would shake their hand. You know, and I would tell them, "Hey! When you grow up, this is how you greet people. You shake hands, and you look at them in the eye." I will tell them in English, I will tell them in Spanish, and I will tell them in English again. And so after a while other kids would come in and shake my hand. I didn't realize that was a

> very deep connection among us. Just that touch. Just the "good morning" and "I'm glad you're here." Hearing that, these kids started coming to school every day, looking for me. So that's one reason that I'm still in the classroom, because I feel that these children need that connection to see somebody like themselves in the classroom.
>
> The connection has to be made for them to trust me. I became their pal. I became their friend. In a sense, sometimes their protector. And so, when they come into the classroom, I want them to feel like they belong. I didn't want them to feel like they were out of place. And treating them with respect allows you to make an even bigger connection. And then they understand that respect is a mutual thing. Even though you're a child, you deserve respect.

Estrella also expressed the mutuality and interchange Stevie experienced. When recalling why it is important to honor our relationships with children, Estrella spoke of the interconnectedness found in Indigenous communities. Estrella said:

> You're not just teaching the little ones, you know. You're learning from them, and they're making you a better teacher, for whoever comes next after us. So you're constantly learning and growing as well with them. It's not like it's a one-way kind of relationship, right? No, because maybe you're gonna have my student and they might have a similar type of help that [they] might need. And you might say, 'Oh, well, I already dealt with this.' Every year. Yes. Children help me learn new things.

Teaching and learning went hand in hand for Indigenous teachers. This interdependence between teachers and children is part of the definition of the Human, where "all forms of interpersonal relationships take on a special significance within Indigenous communities" (Wilson, 2008, p.

84). For Indigenous teachers, the Human is communal respect that leads to learning and growing with and for each other, for the past, present, and future generations. The mutuality in the teaching and learning process is an interconnectedness inherent in Indigenous educational spaces, where relationships with children are not seen as one-way. This perspective recognizes reciprocity and relationality, contributing to the well-being of community across generations.

Experiencing the Human

Indigenous teachers experienced the Human in the classroom, a borderland of practice that may impact their teacher identity. Borderlands of practice are sites where "varying notions of 'best practices' converge, and sometimes conflict, with the professional knowledge and decision-making of teachers" (Delaney, 2015, p. 374). Indigenous teachers' awareness and willingness to experience the Human determined the possibilities and potential to have relationality in their day-to-day experiences in the Head Start classroom.

Stevie has experienced this borderland throughout her career. As a parent and then an assistant teacher, Stevie recalled how a teacher was upset when she spoke Spanish to children, seeing Spanish as a hindrance to assimilation. Stevie recalled the story of her response to the teacher. Stevie stated:

> When I was a little girl, I came into a classroom not knowing a lick of English and how scary it was to go to Head Start and not understand what they're saying to you, because I didn't speak English. So I thought about that and I put myself in these children's place. So when I started Head Start, it wasn't an intentional thing, "Oh, I want to be a Head Start teacher." I kind of stumbled into it out of necessity actually. I saw an ad. They needed TAs [teaching assistants] and I thought I can do that. I can be an assistant. I

noticed that a lot of the Latino children were still in the same boat as I was when I was a kid. The teachers were speaking English to them, and the kids look lost.

So one of the fights that I had at the beginning was with a teacher who told me that I wasn't allowed to speak Spanish to the children. And I told her, you know, I'm going to speak Spanish to these children. Number one, because it's in the performance standards. Number two, we need to communicate with them.

"Because, think about it," I told her. "If you went to China, and they started teaching and talking to you in Chinese, you would not make it one day. And these kids don't have a choice. They need to come. Because the parents are bringing them, we're here. And it's a service that I can provide to them is their native language, and I'm gonna do it."

So you know, when you know your stuff, people get off your back. I thought I was gonna get in trouble. But I didn't. And I kept doing what I knew was right. And so that's how I started to develop this strategy, so-called strategy of mine. I just go day by day, actually.

But I thought, you know what, 40 years ago, I was in this program, and it hasn't changed. These kids are still not understanding English when they speak to them. I'm here to make a connection with them. Bring in all they know from home. And I'm here to guide them and allow them to have a fun time in school. And that was my goal at the beginning. And then later, I figured out that making connections with them, allowed them to trust me.

By allowing children to "bring in all they know from home," Stevie alluded to the Indigenous knowledge "everyday activity and existence . . . becomes part of identity within a personal or cultural context, and this is tied closely to a relationship with others" (Stewart, 2009, p. 325). Speaking the mother-tongue and the native language alludes to what scholar Bear Nicholas used in her critique of English-only programs—"The mother-tongue of children is the language of the community" (Ashton, 2015, p. 89). The community and relationality are built through the interactions with teachers, children, and parents.

Amy also found connection with parents particularly important. When asked if there were any Indigenous families in her classroom, Amy agreed, stating she would notice how the kids were dressed in specific patterned clothing. Amy stated:

> There are still certain things that we bring with us in our culture, that whether it is a pattern of clothing or the beanies that we wear in our hair. Whether it is just bows, like theres certain things that we're like, "You know what? That makes you special. I know you didn't buy this down the street, because your family intentionally wanted you to wear this, to be a part of this. This is something that you bring from home."

As an Indigenous parent herself, Amy explained her role as a teacher and parent blends sometimes. This blending makes way for Indigenous relationality. First, she described being particularly proud of her role as an Indigenous parent. Amy stated:

> I'm still iffy because there's really a lot of things that come to mind that make up my classroom. That makes it, you know, that *home* for me. I'm gonna say for now that it would be my own children and my personal items that I bring in [the classroom] that belong to them. I do bring a picture of my children into the classroom where we do our

> school family. I put a picture of myself with them. And there's always questions as to "Who is that? What does he do? Like, Where is he? Do you have children?" I do have children that say, "Where are they? Where do they go to school?" So I get a lot of interest as to who are these kids that they are spending as much time as we are with you. And I do like to bring that in, just because whenever, like I said before, because of the studies, I will bring stuff that belong to them. And I let them know, "Hey. I'm bringing in XYZ."

In a following conversation, Amy also connected how the identity as an Indigenous parent helped build relationships with other parents. Amy stated:

> It's always interesting getting to know them [the parents] on a deeper level. I feel like the more we talk to each other, the more we know each other, the more free we are when asking questions. You know, they can say, like, "Hey, you know. I don't know what to do." And, you know, some of us have more threads that connect us. And we're like, hey! You know? And it's not until you start getting to know the person that you're like, "We have a lot more things in common than we thought."

In summary, there was a flow between Amy's identity as a teacher and as a parent and the roles that Stevie held as parent, teacher, and advocate. Their roles were a part of a collective identity, reliant on the relationships and relationality built on trust and agreement that assisted in experiencing the Human world in the Head Start classroom.

Weaving the Human

Indigenous ways of knowing and pedagogy appear in the Head Start classrooms "not as an alternative to Western approaches but as a legitimate form of education in and of itself" (Stewart, 2009, p. 319). Teacher identity and pedagogy are tied to the Human, the relationships

teachers have with others—colleagues, parents, and children. It is a pedagogy based on oral traditions, language, rituals, storywork, and experiences (Ashton, 2015). Indigenous teachers weave the Human world throughout everyday classroom routines and practices because they felt a sense of responsibility to both family and community across generations.

Amy integrated her ways of knowing by making a distinction between "figuring out" children versus "understanding" them. She told a story about a time she went into the classroom and the teacher told her about a child who did not talk much. Amy said:

> And sometimes it's like, "Oh, she doesn't really talk a lot." And I'm like, "Yes. You know what? You need to talk to her in Spanish." I have one to two, at least two [children] that I talked to every day in Spanish. And you have to be able to be that person for them. And like I said, language might seem like, oh, you know, I understand, you understand, we're going to understand each other. Some say, "We might not speak the same language, but we're gonna figure it out." Figuring it out - It's not the same as "She understands me, I understand her." Like, okay, I, if I really need something I know that I can ask her. I feel like that when we don't understand each other, we assume. We assume that this is what you need. I assume that this is what you're trying to tell me. Not necessarily being sure that, oh, *this* is what you're trying to tell me. And that's something that I've caught myself with. With other teachers, like I said, it's just this extra thing. I have like an extra superpower of language that I'm able to communicate with everyone.

Amy's "superpower" was her ability to understand children, not merely settle for "figuring out," as she stated in her interview. As Indigenous teachers, *understanding* children can be considered

presencing which is a form of "collective advocacy and mobilization, rooted in spiritual and cultural resurgence" (de Finney, 2014, p. 11).

Presencing is Indigenous relationship in many forms, such as "laughing, hoping, dreaming, connecting, documenting, challenging – are not singular [but instead] they are messy, contradictory, inherently diverse" (de Finney, 2014, p. 11). Indigenous teachers weave this relationality as a "superpower," an open "invitation for us to embody and express the fullness of our lives, a fullness developed over generations of lived and storied experiences" (Morrill & Sabzalian, 2022, p. 32).

Regarding teaching practices, Indigenous teachers let their presence be known to children. Teachers are able to not merely "assume" or "figure it out" what children need but facilitate a deeper connection and understanding. It is more than merely speaking the same language (in this case, Spanish); it is about understanding the perspective, adjusting, and changing according to the child and needs. Young children can identify a teacher who holistically *understands* them—"If I really need something, I know that I can ask her." Indigenous teachers weave the Human by becoming advocates for them in many forms.

Stevie also shared how she has weaved the Human relationship throughout the years. Her Head Start program used a curriculum, *Conscious Discipline*, with a school family as one of the components (Bailey, 2021). The purpose of the school family was to build relationships, by working against a factory model of education; a school family "systematically bonds all members to each other with a sense of belonging" (Bailey, 2021, p. 63).

Stevie recalled weaving relationships with others long before the curriculum, presencing Indigenous relationships that develop over time. Stevie shared:

> I figured out a long time ago that if you make every kid come in and feel special, you can actually get them to follow you, and do what you need them to do easier than if you don't even talk to them all day. So one of the things that the Conscious Discipline has is that we're a school family. But way before Conscious Discipline, I was already telling my kids that we are a school family, that we help each other. And we haven't really had training on that. Other than Conscious Discipline, but, you know, you build each other up, you don't tear each other down. We are respectful to one another. We are, I mean, respect is not something that we are particularly trained on. But it should be taught in the classroom to respect one another, our space, respect the toys because a lot of the kids come in throwing things and stomping on the books and so, in our classroom, even the books are our friends. So you don't step on a friend, you don't step on a book. You pick it up like you pick up your friend.
>
> They [the children] are kind, you know? You know what makes my day is when I see a child, because we always talk about helping each other up. We don't pull each other down. We help each other up. And somebody falls, and they're crying. And before I can even get up to go help them, I have two or three little girls already picking them up. They say, "We're picking them up. We're picking them up."

Indigenous teachers understand although the Head Start curriculum aligns with relationality, it does not go deep enough. In this story, Stevie went into refiguring presences through the use of "stories that presence Indigenous relationships within occupied territories" (Nxumalo, 2019, p. 23). In this case, it was not enough to be a part of a school family; instead, we must respect both the human, other children, and non-human, books and materials.

As with Amy's "superpower" to understand children, Stevie's story reflects "what is important is not that humans live in relation, but that the quality of relationships are able to thrive" (Smith, 2021, p. 193). When Indigenous teachers focus on the quality of relationships, there is an expectation of reciprocity. Indigenous presencing facilitates a deeper holistic connection and understanding between teachers and students valued when seen through the Human world.

Point of Intrigue in the Human World—Genuine Love

Sometimes when weaving a tapestry, the fibers may have variant colors due to the natural dye. Instead of stopping or cutting the fiber, the weavers continue to use this beauty to the fullest. This is where we find this point of intrigue, located in the Human world because it inherently speaks to relationality in past, present, and future. I choose to leave this thread, lightly touched with analysis, as a representation of the depth of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy.

As the conversations began to conclude, all teachers brought out love as a significant experience in the classroom. It is reminiscent of the "importance of love as a counter to colonial violence and hatred of Indigenous peoples, of two-spirit, diverse genders, communities of colour" (Smith, 2021 p. 190). Love is Indigenous knowledge not needed to be implicitly called out until it begins to lack. For example, no one ever talks about breathing until there is a lack of air. Interestingly and significantly, all teachers mentioned love during the interviews. Because love was mentioned in relationality with others in the Human world, it was thematically coded here.

Defining Indigenous Love

Estrella began by shaping what she knew of love in the classroom. Estrella stated:

> I feel that we get trained on how to help the children. We were provided with all these tools. And we were like, Okay, we're gonna try this, we're gonna try that. But we don't talk about that genuine love that we have for them. All that we can have for them, for them to be able to build that relationship. And for them to feel okay, I am safe here.

She added to this definition in a later conversation. Estrella described:

> I feel that love is safety because you're making the connection with a child. And when you have built that relationship for them to come in the classroom, and be themselves, not feel scared, not feel like oh, she's gonna get mad at me if I do this or she's gonna tell me I'm doing something wrong, but it's just for them to feel that they made a connection with you. That they have a healthy relationship.

Rose also defined love in her closing comments. Rose stated:

> Love is like, you know, caring about their feelings, how, what they want to share. It is their emotions, and even if they're having a bad day or something, we offer a hug if they want to hug or that unconditional love. Comfort.
>
> There is a bond between language and relationship. And that bond is safety and love. Would that be right? Like, because we are able to speak a language they are able to build a relationship with us and each other that is based on safety and love.

On Experiencing Genuine Love

> For Amy, love is reciprocal in the classroom. Amy stated:
>
> I feel like children are far more kind hearted, if I can say, they're learning everything that is around them. And if they receive a lot of love, they give a lot of love. If they don't experience a lot of it, then they're also you know, it builds on who we are, you know, like

who our children are. We are, and they are, who we are around them. What we give them is what they're going to have and what they're going to expect from other people.

I think I would like to say that it's a very rewarding job. If you truly love what you do, like working with the children you enjoy, you know, just being part of it and all around . . . if you really are invested in there. It is a very rewarding job and doesn't feel like work.

For Stevie, love is a presence in the classroom. Stevie stated:

When I was younger, I had a lot of love, but we didn't hear it like that. We learned it. I think that you're more at ease when you trust people that are like your family. I can even say love. Because I do have love for my students. And I know my students have love for me. They come in, they hug me. I feel the love. So we are like a little family, in the classroom. But it has to be based on respect for everybody.

Because in order to go back anywhere, you have to have love for what you do. And I do love what I do. I have fun. I really do. And I get real happy.

They used to sing about love and caring and tenderness. I want them [the children] to hear it. So it's intentional. I want them to hear lyrics in a song that talks about love, caring, and kindness. I've been there for that. I can hear that gentle bobbing of the songs of the rhythm. (laughs).

Similarly, Estrella emphasized children feel love throughout the day. Estrella stated:

It's important for them to have that at least for half a day or the 8 hours they're with us; what do they feel comfortable with? They can feel like I'm also loved here. They also listen to me. They also care for me. It helps them in their development and they're learning so that's why I believe that it's important.

Indigenous Love—Taught or Not?

Responses to whether or not love could be taught resulted in a consensus. Stevie expressed aspects of love can be trained, but genuine love cannot. Stevie noted:

> Can love be taught? Compassion can be taught. I think we can start there. Compassion because you know, as adults, we forget a lot of stuff. We forget how children think. We forget how children feel. We forget that, you know, their world is bigger than ours. And that they're learning how to function in it. Can love be taught? I don't know if it can be taught unless it's something that you come with from your house, from your, from your roots, from your ancestors. Then, pour it out and allow the children and everybody around you to enjoy and take from it. I don't know if that makes sense. But that's how I see it. You can try to teach it [love]. You can train people. But I think that if your heart is not in it, if you're not vested in giving, and giving it all, it's not gonna work.

Estrella also recognized the limits of training for love. Estrella stated:

> We get trained on how to help the children. We were provided with all these tools. And we were like, Okay, we're gonna try this, we're gonna try that. But we don't talk about that genuine love that we have for them. All the love we can have for them, for them to be able to build that relationship. And for them to feel okay, I am safe here. Love is not teachable. No, I don't think so. Why? Because it's just something that comes from you. I feel that it is natural - you give out, and it comes from you. It's not something that someone can tell you and teach you or maybe they could talk to you about what it is, what it might look like. But if it's not coming naturally from you, then I don't think it'll be generally you cannot say this is genuine love in that sense.

Summary of Storywork

In exploring how Indigenous teachers understand and experience their indigeneity within the classroom, the findings unveiled profound insights across three dimensions: Physical, Sacred, and Human. This chapter delves into the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous teachers on how they perceive and integrate their Indigeneity within the Head Start classroom, each world revealing and interweaving unique aspects of Indigenous teacher identity and pedagogy.

The Physical world emphasized the critical role of direct engagement of nature and bodily freedom. Head Start's apparent disassociation between minds and the world around them has led to Indigenous teachers becoming advocates. Furthermore, the significance of the body and its mobility emerged as a crucial aspect of the physical dimension in IST, as highlighted by the teachers' practices and experiences. Contrary to the prevalent educational norms that seek to regulate and control physical movement, Indigenous teachers emphasize the importance of bodily freedom and the value of being outdoors in nature. This emphasis on physical mobility and outdoor exposure is not only seen as vital for the health and well-being of the children but also as a fundamental principle supporting learning through direct engagement with the environment.

By advocating for and implementing pedagogical approaches that allow children to move freely and learn in the embrace of nature, these educators are challenging conventional classroom dynamics and accentuating the role of physical experience in the cultivation of a deep, experiential knowledge that aligns with Indigenous ways of knowing and being. This concept aligns with findings from Cox et al. (2021), who found government systems regularly work with the Indigenous community but are not created by the Indigenous community who "value

Indigenous peoples' body parts that need fixing more than the humanness of Indigenous peoples" (p. 11).

In the Sacred world, the storywork from the study pointed to the profound connection Indigenous teachers have to spiritual, more-than-human realms. They integrated the Sacred into daily teaching practices, emphasizing a holistic view of existence anchored in actions and intentions. This nurtured a sense of responsibility and care that transcended individual existence and fostered a deep connection to ancestral wisdom and the continuity of life across generations. Equally important was the manner in which Indigenous teachers perceived children and their innate spirit force. Children are seen not just as human beings but as entities with an intrinsic sacredness.

The Indigenous teachers expressed having a profound connection to the Sacred and incorporated Indigeneity into the teaching and learning with and for little ones. Indigenous artifacts, for example, brought the Sacred into the classroom, embodying rich meanings tied to the natural world, ancestral narratives, and sacred knowledge. Through this approach, the teachers acted as conduits between the Physical and Sacred domains, allowing students to become acquainted with the inherent sacredness within Indigenous cultures.

Equally important was how Indigenous teachers perceived children and their innate spirit force. Children are seen not just as human beings but as entities with an intrinsic sacredness. This perspective underscores the commitment to acknowledging and nurturing the sacred aspect within each student.

Lastly, the Human world emphasized Indigenous teaching and learning practices highlighting relationality and communal learning. Indigenous epistemologies challenge

conventional hierarchical structures in education, promoting a model of learning that is reciprocal and relational. This reciprocal and relational aspect is a form of political integrity that makes us accountable to the community. Indigenous epistemologies dissolve hierarchical barriers and celebrate reciprocity and relationality, contributing to the well-being of the community across generations. The mutuality in the teaching and learning process was evident as relationships with children were not viewed as one-way.

A particularly poignant finding in the Human emerged around the theme of genuine love. Teachers' narratives underscored love as Indigenous knowledge, critical for promoting a sense of belonging and care among students. This love, embodying an authentic and pure essence, was deeply intertwined with the Indigenous commitment to relationality and communal well-being. This unique form of pedagogy, inherent and unteachable through traditional Euro-Western educational methods, is crucial for creating an environment where students feel valued and part of a larger cosmic community. Teachers described this love as a fundamental element that enhances the sense of connection among students.

CHAPTER 5

THREADS, TESTIMONY, AND TAPESTRY

> If: Indigenous teachers are present and doing the work in non-AIAN Head Start classrooms.
>
> Then: How can Indigenous teachers' ways of knowing and being inform Head Start educational practices and policies? (Xet Smith, 2024)

In this chapter, I "tease out some of the knotted threads" (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015, p. 5) that interweave Indigenous teachers in Head Start classrooms and use this knowledge to guide and inform. This study aimed to construct the Head Start classroom as a place where Indigenous teachers want to be, incorporating their pedagogy and ways of knowing to serve children and families. We have witnessed the language Indigenous teachers use to describe their work. My role as a researcher was to provide an avenue for the language, not to limit or contain it, but to give and find harmony. Using Indigenous standpoint theory (IST), data were captured to inform Head Start educational policy and praxis, opening up "Indigenous worldview and knowledge systems to non-indigenous practitioners and researchers" (Fejo-King, 2014, p. 55). Influenced by their standpoint, Indigenous teachers moved beyond decolonization to survivance and indigenization in the Head Start classroom.

On Survivance and Indigenization

Systemic change is often elusive for those with seemingly little power. However, within the realms of Head Start classrooms, Indigenous teachers have found a way to hold immense power within a society that has marginalized them. Zaragoza-Petty (2022) stated, "As long as there is no systemic change to who holds power and the elitist paradigm that sets the agenda,

those without power in our society have no other recourse than to abide by the rules of that system" (p. 39). Yet, Indigenous teachers are challenging this notion by living their true selves, inherently applying survivance and indigenizing their day-to-day practices (Tachine & Nicolazo, 2022).

Survivance is "the degree to which Indigenous peoples and communities have retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity in resisting colonialism" (Smith, 2021, p. 166). It is a form of celebration of Indigenous ways, established through relationality. Through storywork (Archibald, 2008), the teachers in this study articulated their world, named their experiences, and identified themselves in the frame of Head Start (Q'um Q'um Xiiem et al., 2019). For example, Stevie said:

> We belong here. And there's so much to learn about our ancestors in our past; the more you know about them, the stronger your spirit is. And it's not just food. It's not just the land. It's a spiritual thing. It's like a spiritual journey that you actually get to go on, when you start discovering your roots. And how much worth they have.

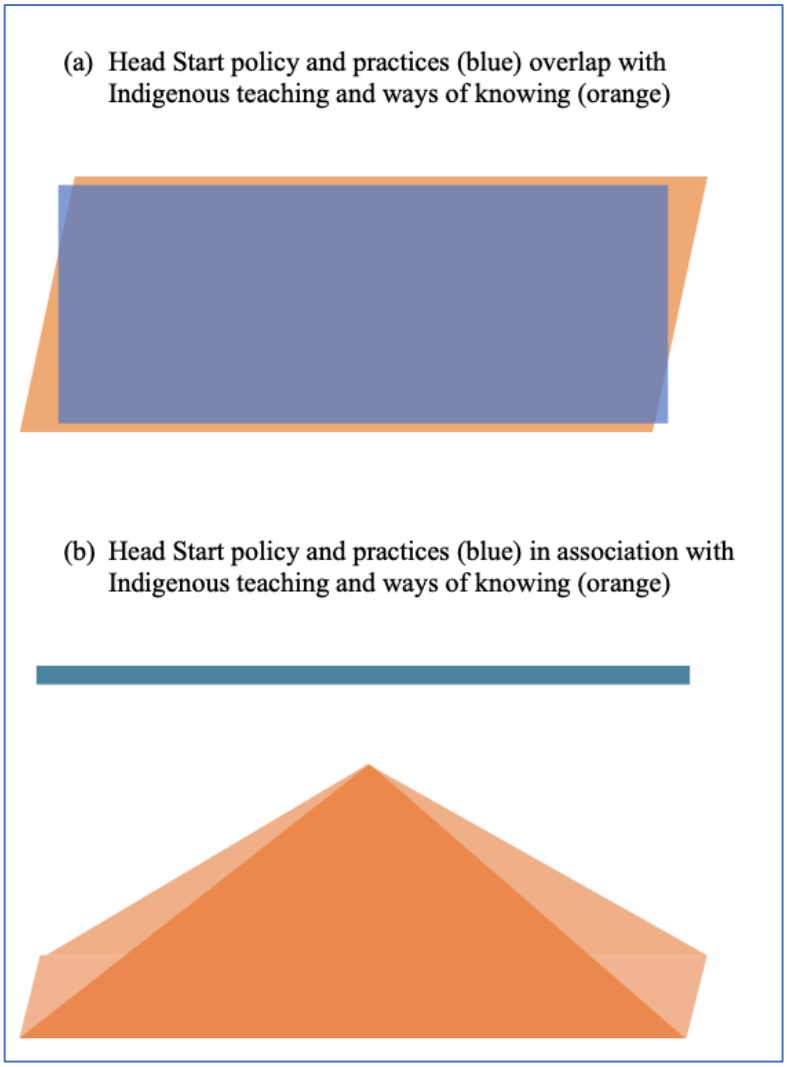
Indigenizing is a step beyond decolonization. Decolonizing education raises the question, "Decolonizing, but to what end?" When colonizers arrived, they saw "pristine, uninhabited landscapes" (Persky & Viruru, 2015, p. 119), "typically disregarding or failing to recognize the careful harvesting and resource management done by Indigenous peoples" (Persky & Viruru, 2015, p. 120). Similarly, when young children arrive to Head Start, they have already been exposed to white supremacy and colonizing systems. The damage and pain endured by colonization in education, even in students' youngest years, cannot be undone. To decolonize is

not enough. Instead, Indigenous teachers are already living in a postcolonial world and have chosen to live their Indigenous ways within a colonized world.

Indigenous ways of knowing and teaching are distinct from Head Start policies and practices. Figure 9 visually represents Head Start policy and practices and its relationship with Indigenous teaching and ways of knowing. At its face (a), Head Start policy and practices may have overlap. Upon closer inspection, in this case a side view (b), Indigenous teaching and ways of knowing are distinct and holistic. This figure is not final or fully complete, but rather a beginning of a visual representation of Indigenous Teacher Standpoint Theory.

Figure 9

Head Start Policy and Practices Associated With Indigenous Teaching and Pedagogy: Two Views



Participant interviews with the Indigenous teachers in this study indicated how "ideas about what childhood 'should' be like collided with the realities the children lived" (Persky & Viruru, 2015, p. 132). Indigenous teachers privileged their voices and were "grounded in the alternative conceptions of world view and value systems" (Smith, 2021, p. 168). Their ways of knowing, ontology and epistemology, and pedagogy were found in the margins, embedded in the places Head Start performance standards have left blank. This is not to say their work was

unworthy and should stay in the margins; rather, Indigenous teachers have sought opportunities to flourish where they are. Despite the diversity among Indigenous teachers and their pedagogical approaches, striking commonalities emerged, rooted in a shared commitment to resisting colonial frameworks and fostering an educational space that acknowledges and celebrates Indigenous identity and wisdom.

Therefore, the implications for Head Start policy and praxis are prioritizing the transformative power of Indigenous ways of knowing and pedagogy. Through IST, the data pointed to a form of "reclamation of Indigenous knowledge systems, Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies which have been marginalized through settler colonisations in the process of cultural genocide" (Dudgeon, 2021, p. 102). The following analysis is organized based on Foley (2003) and Rigney's (1999a) Indigenist research methodology[1]. I explore the nuances of Indigenous teacher identity and pedagogical practices through survivance and indigenization around the three critical dimensions: (a) the Physical with resistance as emancipatory, (b) the Sacred with Indigenist voice, and (c) the Human with political integrity.

Survivance and Indigenization Through the Resistance of the Physical

The perceived disconnect between the Head Start program and its surroundings has spurred Indigenous educators to become champions for bridging the gap between minds and the environment. Indigenous families, students, and teachers are often invisible in the Head Start space, which is deeply entrenched in Eurocentric and Westernized structures. As highlighted by Henward et al. (2019), teachers feel pressured to implement curricula aligned with federal policy,

[1] Indigenist research (Rigney, 1999a) was a contributing voice to Foley's (2003) Indigenous Standpoint Theory. Highlighting Rigney's work is not a form of diversion away from IST but rather an acknowledgment of how it is situated within the broader Indigenous research community.

even when it may not align with their practices. Like the theory of "untouched" nature, Indigenous ways of knowing do not come naturally or without work. Instead, there is a harmony of being Indigenous in the first place. There is contact with the community and relationality with the Physical, filling the gaps of Eurocentric education. Indigenous teachers carry the Physical within them, rather than require curriculum or themes to bring it out.

Head Start's apparent disassociation between minds and the world around them has led to Indigenous teachers becoming advocates for the Physical. Head Start curriculum focusing on the Physical with a Western gaze is an example of the "dehumanizing characterization of the Indigenous peoples as the oppressed victims in need of charity" (Foley, 2003, p. 48). For example, the study of trees limited Rosa from teaching about the planet Earth. Similarly, the curriculum practice designated "breathing" as a strategy rather than a necessity. Amy said, "We can do our breathing standing up; we don't need to be sitting down." This concept points to a mismatch of research meeting praxis. Though the Head Start designated curriculums are indeed "research-based," they have led to a top-down treatment of child development rather than using the community's strengths (Whitesell et al., 2022). This approach is concerning because the number of American Indian and Alaskan Native (AIAN) families and children living outside of Region XI[2] has continued to grow and become more involved in nonspecific AIAN Head Start.

The epistemic practices of the Head Start curriculum, which places nature as other, led to teachers in this study to Indigenize educational materials (Kelly & Rigney, 2022, p. 392). They

[2] The Office of Head Start separates Regions I—X by geography, Region XI was defined by their setting and populations served—AIAN communities located on Tribal lands. Of all AIAN children in Head Start, 54% were served in Region XI and 46% of AIAN children and families were served in non-AIAN Head Start programs (Bernstein et al., 2021).

did so by teaching a reading of the nature around them and acknowledging humans are not in the center; instead, we are with the Physical. Recognizing the Physical outlives us as a people, teachers asserted, “Non-human existents and humans co-become in place/space” (Kelly & Rigney, 2022, p. 394). Teachers interwove the linguistics of the natural world instead of the linguistics of the written language.

Survivance, a concept beyond mere survival encompassing active resistance and the reassertion of Indigenous identity and knowledge, was evident in how Indigenous educators adapted and resisted the standardized curriculum. This resistance is an assertion of cultural identity and sovereignty, challenging the erasure of Indigenous epistemologies and promoting the survival of these knowledge systems through educational practices. This resistance challenges Eurocentric epistemologies who have “been intent on documenting the demise and cultural assimilation of Indigenous peoples” (Smith, 2021, p.166). The conflict between Indigenous pedagogical values and federal educational policies is emblematic of a broader struggle against the dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies. This resistance highlights the need for educational systems to recognize and incorporate diverse ways of knowing. By challenging the invisibility of Indigenous knowledge systems within mainstream education, these educators advocated for an epistemological pluralism valuing multiple forms of knowledge.

Indigenization involves reshaping educational content and methods to align with Indigenous knowledge, values, and pedagogies. By integrating the living environment into the curriculum, Indigenous teachers are not just teaching academic content but also indigenizing education by making it more relevant and holistic. Indigenous educational approaches are deeply rooted in environmental contexts, reflecting a holistic understanding of the world. This approach

contrasts with the compartmentalized and individualized learning often promoted by "research-based" non-Indigenous curricula. By integrating the physical environment into learning, Indigenous pedagogies offer a model for education not only culturally responsive but also environmentally conscious.

Survivance and Indigenization of Political Integrity of the Human World

Indigenous ways of knowing dissolved hierarchical divides and promoted reciprocity, fostering community well-being over time and across space. In the Head Start classrooms, relationality serves and informs Indigenous teacher pedagogy by making them accountable to the community (Foley, 2003). The term political integrity refers to the responsibility of relationality, beyond the curriculum requirement. Teachers alluded to relationships in specific forms including parents, children, students, colleagues, with a sense of commitment to each. There was a greater emphasis on the collective *we* rather than the independent I. Amy sang songs and chanted to increase a greater sense of community. Estrella spoke of the future child benefitting from her learning from her current children.

A commitment to people overshadowed the request for curriculum fidelity. Stevie alluded to this commitment in her borderland of practice by speaking Spanish and making connections, even when asked to stop. Previous researchers found a similar episode when studying Indigenous Head Start teachers in American Samoa. Henward et al. (2019) wrote:

> They [the teachers] were bound by federal policy, and as they assured us, failure to oblige would have deleterious effects, the most notable was the loss of funding. As the director explained, the ECEC [early childhood education center] program was funded under one grant which provided the vast majority of funding for the program. While the teachers

> felt pressure to implement the curriculum, in actuality, they rarely endorsed the practices as intended. (p. 40)

As discussed in the literature review, Indigenous practices have been defined as culturally safe; trauma-informed; and meeting physical, social, and spiritual needs. Indigenous pedagogies, primarily relational and rooted in storytelling and nature (Wright et al., 2019), are crucial for Head Start classrooms but often require "remaking and reweaving" to adapt to prescribed curricula (Henward et al., 2019, p. 34). To focus on relationality, Indigenous teachers commit themselves to a "peaceful co-existence" (West, 1998, p. 2), deeply connecting with children, parents, and each other for presence. Overall, as evidenced in this research, Indigenous ways of knowing and teaching are distinct from the recommended Head Start policies and practices through their relationality to the Physical, their commitment to the Human, and their precious knowledge of the Sacred.

Authenticity and kinship are also tenets of political integrity in teaching practices. Political integrity ensures the Head Start classroom is an inclusive and reciprocal environment for teachers and students, resisting hegemony and upholding various truths. Political integrity in teaching practices encourages inclusivity as a means for survival, not assimilation; there is a moment when inclusion in Euro-Western thought focuses on fitting into the dominant form (Ashton, 2015).

Head Start teaching practices can move "toward greater critical thinking of pedagogy in collaboration with engaged teachers who value diversity, child voice, and agency to reform society" (Rigney, 2020, p. 579). Viewing Indigenous teachers as "competent subjects and experts of their life-worlds" (Rigney, 2020, p. 579) can lead to programs that surpass cultural

competency expectations that are currently the norm. For example, by acknowledging Indigenous teachers' borderlands of practice like Stevie's and Rose's, teachers and centers can begin to cocreate hope. Persky and Viruru (2015) wrote:

> Those who inhabit the borderlands develop a tolerance for ambiguity and learn to operate in a "pluralistic" mode, where nothing is abandoned as hopeless. Everything is absorbed and then transformed into a new consciousness, that of the "mestiza" . . . like corn, [mestizas] become adept at flourishing in a variety of conditions. (p. 133)

This concept is true political integrity in teaching practices—the increase of hope for survivance—to be able to flourish wherever the Indigenous is planted. This is especially poignant considering the massive displacement at the hands of colonization. Political integrity requires collaboration with Indigenous teachers, more than a tokenization of input. Collaboration can look like providing a place for Indigenous teachers to tell their story, their journeys, and their ways of knowing. As Rose alluded, collaboration provides a place to teach both the culture and cultural.

Lastly, the distinctiveness of genuine love in the Indigenous educational context lies in its innateness and consensus among educators though certain aspects like compassion can be encouraged—genuine love itself is an unteachable yet omnipresent force. This perspective underscores the understanding that genuine love emanates from deep cultural and ancestral roots, reflecting a commitment to the well-being and holistic development of students that cannot be artificially constructed or imposed.

Survivance and Indigenization Through Indigenist Voice in the Sacred

Indigenous teachers perceived children and their innate spirit force. Children were seen not just as human beings but also as entities with an intrinsic sacredness, and the holistic understanding was rooted in Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy. From an Indigenous perspective, the teacher-student journey is nonlinear and rooted in meaning-making and relationships (Field, 2022). However, a haunting presence emerges when the stories of Indigenous experiences are not heard or acknowledged. As Ashton (2015) noted, ghosts haunt not only direct targets of institutional violence but also those who work in these institutions as they become aware of the inflicted pain. The Sacred world has allowed teachers to privilege Indigenous voices, by being "aware and respectful" (Foley, 2003, p. 48) of the pain, to allow for both spiritual and physical healing.

Indigenous teachers in this study did not have to separate the Sacred from the Human and the Physical world. Instead, it was intertwined. The Head Start classroom and its two-dimensional curriculum were enriched by the three-dimensional, holistic reality Indigenous teachers bring. The storywork indicated teachers acknowledging the Sacred within each child, perceiving their innate spirit force and fostering deep connections. These connections came from ancestral wisdom and pointed to the continuity of life across generations. They were not just acknowledging children but healing them in everyday interactions. Children, in turn, healed them as well. There was a type of transcendence between teacher and child in daily teaching practices. This holistic view was intentional, as noted in their artifacts and narratives.

The relationship Indigenous educators have with the Sacred world is not just in the metaphysical but in the expansive relationality of the more-than-human. For example, Amy

alluded to breathwork for more than just healing. The breathwork Indigenous teachers alluded to was a part of the wraparound approach addressing not just the physical needs of the children but also the social ailments found in Head Start communities. Indigenous teachers acknowledged in this society, it was not just the children requiring healing but society as a whole.

The relationality Indigenous teachers have with the more-than-human is more than "classroom management procedures, necessity, and efficiency, and how-to techniques" (Darder, 2016, p. 20) of behavioral objectives used by Euro-Western curriculum. The approach is instead an act of Indigenous resistance through healing work. In this case, the intentionality of breathwork is indigenization, which is used as trauma-informed care. It is an active rejection of an oppressive curriculum attempting to create conditions for breathing. This also includes resistance to a mandated "school family" to which Stevie alluded (Bailey, 2021).

As part of the classrooms themselves, Indigenous teaching practices that honor the Sacred Indigenist voice look like a dialogic relationship with Stevie's "life force." For Stevie, this "life force" was the joy children bring daily. In Indigenous teaching practices, healing coexists between the student and teacher, where they can influence each other and discuss what are considered positive outcomes. Implementing Indigenous ways of knowing and pedagogy by holding hands with the Sacred will allow relationality to form in the classrooms, taking form in community healing.

The Tapestry: Implications

Indigenous Head Start teachers are dynamic agents of Indigenization and survivance. These educators actively dismantle and reconstruct educational spaces to mirror Indigenous epistemologies and lived experiences by deliberately integrating place-based knowledge,

communal values, and spiritual dimensions. Their microcosmic practices represent a powerful resistance against colonial educational paradigms, asserting the vitality and relevance of Indigenous knowledge systems within contemporary education. Head Start should not dismiss or trivialize what teachers do by placing these acts under culturally relevant teaching or solely to support multicultural principles. Instead, these are transformative acts and the power of their work is radical and intentional. Often, topics in early childhood are seen as simple and overlooked because Eurocentric ways of knowing value power and scale. However, Indigenous Head Start teachers remain dynamic agents in their day-to-day interactions with children and their families.

Survivance, for Indigenous educators, transcends the mere preservation of cultural and spiritual traditions; it embodies a holistic practice that interweaves relationality, communal well-being, and sacredness within the fabric of education. These educators engage in survivance as a method of cultural and spiritual retention and as a transformative process nurturing resilience, identity, and community cohesion. Through their pedagogical choices, Indigenous teachers affirm and celebrate the enduring vibrancy of Indigenous cultures within Head Start classrooms, challenging and reshaping colonial narratives and practices.

Indigenization, as practiced by Indigenous educators in the Head Start program, represents a radical act that extends beyond the confines of the decolonization curriculum. By authentically embodying Indigenous ways of being and knowing in a colonized educational landscape, these educators enact a fundamental reimagining and reclamation of educational spaces to honor and center Indigenous perspectives and wisdom.

The tapestry of the story work is naming survivance and Indigenization from the standpoint of Indigenous Head Start teachers. This is significant because Indigenization and survivance are valid and credited in academia. Indigenous wisdom and pedagogy have value and are considered transformative. For it to survive, it needs to be protected and funded. Indigenous ways of knowing are unique and are found outside of AIAN Head Start programs. Through funding and supporting Indigenous survivance and Indigenization, Head Start can fulfill its promise to protect Indigenous knowledge to improve programming and service delivery for children and families (Administration for Children and Families, 2010).

Recommendations: The Beauty of the Tapestry

Head Start's potential for true Indigenization lies in observing the tapestry work of Indigenous teachers and having them ask themselves, "What can we do better?" By collaborating with these teachers, Head Start can avoid the common pitfall of asking others to reconstruct what one has broken. Ashton (2015) stated, "That those who endure the violence of settler colonialism also somehow bear the burden of resolving it for those who most profit from it" (p. 83).

The lived experience and practices of Indigenous Head Start teachers are distinct from Head Start policy and practices. They are Indigenizing, not solely in performance but also in implementation. Their identity as Indigenous pervades the practices because it is who they are. Indigenous educators move beyond a decolonized and culturally responsive curriculum. I recommend guidelines for Head Start practices and policies based on this research evidence. Using IST, the methodology terms are used as guidelines for practice and policy to inform an Indigenous teacher standpoint theory (Foley, 1983). IST works actively and deliberately against colonization and is "an activity of hope" (Smith, 2021, p. 258). By asserting Indigenous

epistemologies, IST challenges the assumed universality of Western knowledge and decenters Eurocentric perspectives dominating the academic and social discourse.

The following section discusses how the findings of this single study in Head Start teaching practices and policy can be impacted by Indigenous teacher standpoint theory using the resistance of the Physical, the political integrity of the Human, and Sacred Indigenist voice. This is Indigenous teacher work and the beauty it holds in this early childhood community.

Resistance of the Physical in Teaching Practices and Policy—"Reading" Nature and Implementing Indigenous Perspectives

My recommendation for Head Start teaching practices is to focus on a type of "reading" of the nature that surrounds teachers and students with an inquisitive astute approach to become caretakers for the generations to come. One must ask, what stories do those trees hold? How did the rocks come to be? Unlike a Western-Eurocentric curriculum practice asking teachers to make discoveries deeply impacted by a colonizer gaze, this strategy asks teachers and classrooms to build relationships with nature.

The strategy of resisting and Indigenizing through the land parallels the process of critical Indigenous pedagogy of place, Trinidad's (2012) framework focusing on Indigenizing the youth food justice movement in Native Hawaii. This method can motivate youth to learn about producing, representing, and expressing native knowledge and values, but only if led by Indigenous teachers and programming. Resistance in the teaching practices is Indigenous empowerment by "posess[ing] a role of agency and interpretation of meanings" (Trinidad, 2012, p. 3).

This approach may also encourage children to be caretakers of the wildlife around them and plant native wildlife in their gardens to restore the original inhabitants, like how it has been observed in Canadian Indigenous communities (Sumner et al., 2019). This process acknowledges Indigenous ways of knowing by recognizing place-based food systems. Planting native plants is often a source of food for local wildlife, resulting in "Indigenous communities [that] are building Indigenous food sovereignty and food security through food procurement initiatives" (Sumner et al., 2019, p. 240). By feeding wildlife, we are feeding ourselves[3]. Strategies such as gardening native plants provide horizontal shared power, a reciprocity, that honors and cares for the Physical.

In policy, acknowledging the Physical is more than emancipatory enlightenment; the recommendation is the emancipatory imperative for the Indigenous people. Indigenous ways of knowing and pedagogy have been marginalized from government policy due to the United States' colonialist history of eradicating Indigenous cultures (Godden, 2017; Rigney, 2020). Applied policy from this government has resulted in the same marginalization in Head Start centers.

I recommend that policymakers include Indigenous perspectives in education, especially regarding outdoor environments, that challenge existing policies and frameworks upholding Eurocentric values. Resisting Euro-centric frameworks is achieved through Indigenous people by our mere existence. Indigenous people are a part of the ecosystem, like a lemon tree growing through the concrete. By reimagining policy, Indigenous people can continue to bloom where we

[3] These recommendations concern teaching practices and policy. I weave myself into these recommendations as a reminder to hold myself accountable to them.

stand. One may ask what it would look like to include children as not merely subjects in the Head Start classrooms but as "custodians of ancient and contemporary Indigenous knowledge where they are protagonists in their learning as co-constructors of knowledge with their elders, families, and community" (Rigney, 2020, p. 580). What would it look like instead of encouraging children to use an easel to paint what they see in "untouched" nature (Rigney, 2020, p. 582), Head Start enacted policies that observed children by caretakers of nature around them? What if Head Start gave all children "the right to not inherit a dead planet" (Rigney, 2020, p. 582)?

Policymakers can consider a cradle-to-career approach by recognizing empowering Indigenous relationality with the Physical as a holistic approach. In policy, the Physical can be highlighted if we "ensure Indigenous involvement in university governance, management, teaching and learning, and research and a greater presence of Indigenous staff in the academy" (Frawley et al., 2017, p. 7). Valuing and supporting Indigenous research is the place to start making good and fulfilling Head Start's requirement program policy, aligning with the "principles of scientific research" (*Head Start Act*, 2007, Sec 637). If research has highlighted the inter-relationships Indigenous teachers have with the Physical, it can be applied to local Head Start centers outside of AIAN centers. Indigenous policymakers, researchers, professors, and management could open the academy toward Indigenization that sees, hears, and engages with street data, a "decolonizing form of knowledge" uplifting those working in the margins (Safir & Dugan, 2021, p. 19).

Political Integrity in the Human in Teaching Practices and Policy—Indigenous Relationality and Kinship

Based on the evidence, my recommendation for teaching practices includes expanding the relationship in Head Start by increasing the relationality of the Indigenous community. Sustaining a relationship with the Indigenous community will lead Head Start toward an Indigenous pedagogy of oral traditions, rituals, and storywork (Ashton, 2015). Stevie expressed this movement through her use of ribbons and music. Amy noted it when she discussed the chants she brought to her classroom. This "language in motion" (Hornberger, 2014, p. 285) allows members to coconstruct Indigenous identity as part of their learning through the oral interactions they are a part of. Because Indigenous views are place- and space-based, these strategies are to be completed not as mere performances but as a relationship offering a context in stories and symbols. Battiste (2008) indicated, "Indigenous knowledge is embedded in the cumulative experiences and teachings of Indigenous peoples rather than in a library or in journals of applied research" (p. 87).

Head Start would do well to continue coming back to Indigenous children and families to learn more about their experiences in the community off the reservations. Stevie said:

> I hope that people that go into this field, understand and realize that you cannot waste not one day because you don't get it back. So, if you are busy ignoring the children when you're supposed to be talking with them, you're doing a disservice to them.

In other words, policymakers should understand time is essential because children are already in our care. Similarly, the Office of Head Start should actively seek to understand how those

subjected to policies are affected by them because applied policies created without Indigenous begin with a settler-colonizer mindset (Ashton, 2015).

Political integrity of the Human in policy is a recognition of kinship and a responsibility to honor kin. Indigenous communities are upheld by their heterogeneous nature rather than a focus on assimilation and heteronormative practices found in non-AIAN classrooms. Honoring kinship looks like acknowledging colonization practices in Head Start spaces and understanding the Indigenous cultures where Head Start programs are physically located, not as a mere suggestion in the multicultural principles, but as a requirement for administrators and leaders.

In addition, the political integrity of the Human in policy can be seen as a call for revitalizing Indigenous languages within the Head Start framework. Evident from Amy's advocacy of truly understanding children's language as her "superpower," her "teachers' identity is inextricably intertwined with language use and cultural practices that help [teachers] to understand sacred roles and responsibilities in relationship to daily social, political, and ceremonial life" (Peterson et al., 2019, p. 40). Applied policies can be seen as having language keepers, from local Indigenous tribes or Indigenous elders, as an integral part of the classroom structure. In addition, it could be creating a partnership with local tribes to provide access to care and resources for newer Indigenous families, with help from local translators.

Sacred Indigenist Voices in Teaching Practices and Policy—Valuing Indigenous Truths and Mixed-Methods Research

Indigenist voices in teacher practices are grounded in valuing Indigenous truths, often seen as barriers to learning through a Eurocentric-Western lens. My recommendation for the Head Start classroom is instead of conflicting with the Sacred, the Head Start classroom can

begin acknowledging the Sacred Indigenist voice by partnering with local Indigenous communities. Romero-Little (2011) recommended sitting with Indigenous communities to begin to understand the "beloved child" (p. 92) of the Indigenous family. Stevie and Amy alluded young Indigenous children are "spiritual beings returning to the Physical world; they are intellectual sacred beings connected to others even before birth" (Romero-Little, 2011, p. 92).

The Sacred Indigenous voice in policy is anchored in Indigenous voice and being. If we are serving Indigenous families in early childhood, we should use methodologies anchored in Indigenous voices. Indigenous methods, centered on Indigenous voice, meet Indigenous research requirements. Institutionalized research used for Head Start policy has historically silenced Indigenous voices. Yoon and Chen (2022) wrote, "A first trace of institutional, state-sanctioned violence is silencing and erasure, while ironically often coincides with hyperdocumentation and regulation" (p. 80). This hyperdocumenation and regulation can be translated for data figures, quantitive outcomes, or protocols based on colonizer mindsets whose focus is on objectification and measuring the Other (Smith, 2021).

Head Start should develop a mixed-method approach for measuring outcomes regarding early childhood quality. As supported by the findings, Indigenous pedagogy and ways of knowing are holistic work that is not limited by the Euro-Western methods on which funding is based. By expanding its methodologies, Head Start could capture more data from those working in the margins. These data are best completed in qualitative methods such as interviews, storywork, or participatory research by researchers that reflect the community. Indigenous researchers are already available to support and guide the way. A mixed-methods approach highlighting the Sacred also meets Marks et al.'s (2003) recommendation that Indigenous

research should be more than ethnographic or case studies, but rather systemic large-scale works like the American Indian Alaskan Native Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (AIAN FACES) studies (Bernstein et al., 2018, Bernstein et al., 2021).

Summary of Recommendations

Indigenous Head Start teachers actively engage in Indigenization and survivance by incorporating distinct ways of knowing and being into educational spaces. By asserting the vitality of Indigenous knowledge systems, their practices are not confined to a binary framework of either/or, such as colonizing and decolonizing curricula; instead, they transcend these constructs to encompass a holistic worldview that integrates multiple dimensions. By weaving together diverse aspects of life, Indigenous educators create learning environments that are interconnected and relational. Knowledge is dynamic and evolving, with multiple entry points and pathways. This perspective honors the diverse experiences and insights each learner brings to the educational space, allowing for a more inclusive approach. Ultimately, Indigenous knowledge systems offer robust and comprehensive frameworks for early childhood education, offering an opportunity for Head Start to protect, fund, and fulfill its promise to improve programming for *all* children and families.

Conclusion

The Office of Head Start has prioritized holistic quality education services for children and communities in greatest need. First, since 1965, the federal government has funded, regulated, and publicly aided over 38 million children through Head Start programming, including AIAN and Migrant programs (Administration for Children and Families, n.d.). In 2019, over $10 billion was budgeted for the program, resulting in 1,047,000 low-income children

and their families receiving services (Office of Head Start, 2022a). Head Start has served a small but significant percentage of the nation's millions of children under 5 years old. In addition, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation has funded research to improve quality and child outcomes, with research recommendations that significantly guide state and local early childhood policy (Kooragayala, 2019). The *Head Start Act* (2007) noted programming should be shaped based on research that meets Head Start's definition of "principles of scientific research" necessary to be considered for policy (Section 637). Lastly, updated in 2023, the multicultural principles have served as a resource to improve programming and service delivery for children and families. Unlike the Head Start performance standards that *require* programs to demonstrate respect for and respond to all the different cultures in their service area, the principles are not attached to funding or performance reviews. Still, they are instead considered best practices for the programs. These principles do not do enough to support Indigenous pedagogy outside of tribal reservations (Administration for Children and Families, 2010).

Through this study, the Office of Head Start can recognize the potential and necessity for Indigenization in Head Start by amplifying the voices of Indigenous teachers already weaving and making their way into classrooms. The disconnect between research, policy, and the lived experiences of Indigenous teachers can only be bridged through meaningful collaboration and acknowledgment of the unique ways of knowing and teaching that Indigenous educators bring to Head Start spaces. Through Survivance, Indigenous teachers continue to reclaim what colonization has attempted to erase. Supporting this work highlights the need for policies that reimagine early childhood education informed with and for Indigenous teachers.

For the Harmony—A Letter

Dear Indigenous teachers,

You enrich the classrooms in the margins, the spaces where Head Start policy and practices do not touch. Overall, Indigenous early childhood education has been understudied and plagued by Westernized and Eurocentric research requirements. Even more, there has not been enough Indigenous research benefitting our Indigenous families and communities. Although Head Start provides a guide through the multicultural principles, by not being attached to funding, many of its goals have acted merely as suggestions. In addition, if we separate the Indigenous knowledge and practices from the people, incorporating these ways of teaching and knowing may be seen as a "form of settler appropriation" (Ashton, 2015, p. 90). Indigenous ways of knowing are distinct and unique and are often found outside of AIAN programs if one knows how to see them. Indigenous teachers in Head Start enrich the classroom, not forgetting who they are but weaving ways of knowing and pedagogy in everyday practices. You are experiencing life from an Indigenous teacher standpoint, a unique and verified place filled with hope, honor, and beauty.

We are teaching and learning from each other, not because of luck or good taste, but because we understand inherently the importance of Indigenous presence in our children and families' lives. The genuine love we embody is authentic and gives me hope we will continue to create spaces of healing and thriving for each other and for our children. We are not fighting against; rather, we are fighting for children, families, and systems to understand their wholeness. Let us continue finding the harmony in the work.

If Head Start policy and practices take heed, learn to listen, and then get to work, they might begin to understand our highly skilled labor requires a fundamental shift. This shift includes practical steps such as higher wages, access to quality work environments, and fundamental systemic changes in our agencies. It also requires some brave steps, such as acknowledging Indigenous ways of knowing and removing systemic barriers in the way. It also requires a return to the land, not just a tokenized curriculum. Lastly, this shift includes acknowledging the Sacred work around us and our responsibility to honor the more-than-human.

As I continue this journey, I honor us through my responsibility and moral obligation to hold the door open for us, lay down the carpet and flowers to acknowledge our spirit, and continue to heal those who came before us and those who have yet to arrive.

I love you, genuinely.

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