

At.oow:

Indigenous Storywork and the Teaching of Literacy in Indigenous Education

Karen J Elliott

Saxoon

B.A., American Indian Studies, Minor in Education, University of Washington, Seattle

M.Ed., Education Policy, University of Washington, Seattle

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Supervisory Committee Name of committee chair, Chair

Dawn Hardison-Stevens (Omushkeg Cree/Anishinabek Ojibway/Cowlitz/Steilacoom), Ph.D.

Michelle R. Montgomery, MA, MPP, PhD

Dian Million (Tanana), Ph.D.

Edward Thomas (Tlingit), Honorary Doctorate

Program Authorized to Offer Degree: Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

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Abstract

The epistemological framework guiding Native-focused classrooms and curricula is rooted in representing and honoring diverse Indigenous and heritage languages such as Lushootseed, Tlingit, Haida, other Indigenous languages, and Spanish, reflecting the linguistic and cultural diversity of the student population. My educational leadership career started at Daybreak Star Preschool, located within Discovery Park on Bernie Whitebear Road. The natural landscape serves as both a classroom and a teacher. Through nature walks and place-based learning, students engage deeply with the land and its non-human communities, fostering an understanding of interconnectedness and respect. This research highlights how early learning integrates land-based knowledge systems as a foundation for social and emotional learning (SEL), aligning with Indigenous frameworks of relationality and responsibility. Furthermore, the study situates this work within broader Native education leadership initiatives, including participation in the Tlingit and Haida Washington Chapter's Youth Initiatives and service as president of the Seattle School District's Title VII (now Title VI) Indian Education program, as well as the Seattle Urban Native Education/Clear Sky programs. These roles underscore a sustained commitment to advancing Indigenous pedagogical models, community engagement, and culturally grounded approaches to education.

Keywords: at.oow, Moiety, Potlatch, Indigenous Literacy

Acknowledgements

Háw'aa (Haida) and gunalchéesh (Tlingit) mean "thank you. I want to begin by honoring my ancestors and grandmothers, Olive Ross Natkong (Haida) and Audrey Rowan Peratrovich (Tlingit), as well as my Tlingit teacher, Esther Shea. I am grateful to my parents, mentors, and ancestors: Marian Lauth Peratrovich and Frederick Lauth Sr., Norma Jean and Francis Dunne, and Jan and Sadutes (Robert) Peele. I am grateful to my siblings, Carol Lauth Anderson and Fred Lauth Jr.; to my children, Reese, Karim, Emad, and Bethany; to my son-in-law, Juan; and to my beautiful grandchildren, Alonzo and Athena.

I want to acknowledge the Tlingit and Haida tribes; the Nisqually Tribe, whose underlying traditions are important to learn; the Nisqually Head Start faculty; the University of Washington Muckleshoot Tribal cohort 2; and my Nisqually Writing Center buddies for their support and guidance. I want to thank my corporations for their scholarships: Sealaska and Cape Fox Corporation. gunalchéesh / háw'aa for my committee of Dr Dawn Hardison-Stevens, Dr Michelle Montgomery, Dr Dian Million, and Dr. Edward Thomas. I appreciate your input and support in my dissertation. You will be lifelong mentors.

I am an McNair Scholar; they played an important role in my Education Carrer.

Dedication

Parents, Fred and Marian Lauth
Siblings, Carol Lauth Anderson and Fred Lauth Jr

Children, Reese, Karim, and Emad

Daughter Bethany, son-in-Law Juan, and

Grandchildren, Alonzo and Athena

Haida Grandma, Olive Ross Natkong

Tlingit Grandma, Audrey Rowan Peratrovich

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Indigenous literacy is central to this dissertation. While English writing adheres to structured, rule-based systems designed to achieve academic proficiency, Indigenous languages have long existed as oral traditions, dating back to time immemorial. The English literacy system, including the use of capital letters and rigid syntax, does not entirely correspond with Indigenous modes of communication and knowledge. Language educators, such as Vi Hilbert, a Lushootseed scholar and dictionary author, and Esther Shea, a Tlingit instructor, initiated efforts to develop written forms of their Indigenous languages. In this dissertation, the traditional knowledge of the Tlingit and Lushootseed languages is significant. As the researcher, I used lowercase letters to indicate that the language was transmitted orally.

Tlingit Introduction

saxoon yoo xhat duwasaakw dleit kaa x'einaxh Karen Elliott yoo xhat duwasaakw yeil naa xat sitee taakwaaneidi aya hxat deikeenaa yadi aya xhat Seattle kwan ka heinyaa kwan daxh: My Tlingit name is Saxoon; my English Name is Karen Elliott. The traditional clan systems of the Tlingit and Haida nations are founded upon two primary moieties: Raven and Eagle (or Wolf), as well as the Strongman and Woodworm Women clans. Currently, I reside in Seattle, sharing a residence with my parents. My mother, Marian Peratrovich (Raven, Strongman, and Woodworm Women), is from Klawock, Alaska, while my father, Fred Lauth Sr. (Eagle Frog), is from Hydaburg, Alaska. I was born and raised in Ketchikan, Alaska, alongside my sister Carol and my brother Fred Lauth, Jr. Our family has expanded to include four children: Bethany, Reese, Karim, and Emad, as well as my son-in-law, Juan, and two grandchildren, Alonzo and Athena. At the outset of my doctoral studies, I was engaged with the Title VI Indian Education program within the Edmonds School District. I initially served as the Disabilities Coordinator,

and I now hold the position of Early Head Start Family Service Coordinator for the Nisqually Tribe Head Start program, where I support families in accessing community services for children from birth to age three. Like many who are committed to improving educational systems, I am deeply dedicated to Native education. Engagement with the Seattle Native community began when my children enrolled in Daybreak Star Preschool, which was initially part of a Head Start program grounded in Native pedagogical philosophy. This experience marked the beginning of an enduring passion, leading to involvement in Native leadership and advocacy efforts. The Urban Native community can find information regarding Urban Native programs that incorporate Indigenous pedagogies, and community-based educators are featured on the Daybreak Star webpage, which states, “ha?ł sləx̌il good day! Welcome to Daybreak Star Preschool, a high-quality early learning program rooted in Indigenous, play-based, emergent curriculum that views children and their families as competent contributors to our community” (Daybreak Star Preschool website, 2022).

Persistent literacy disparities among American Indian and Alaska Native students in Washington State and Alaska remain a concern (American Institutes for Research, 2023; McCardle & Berninger, 2014). How can culturally responsive strategies enhance students’ reading and writing outcomes? By integrating Indigenous knowledge systems into English literacy instruction, educational institutions can support Native students’ academic achievement and, through storytelling, foster the development of Native identities. This research was guided by a primary question: How do public education systems and Indigenous educators and leaders collaborate to implement culturally grounded literacy practices, such as storytelling, to support Indigenous students’ English reading and writing development?

Storywork and Storytelling as a Legitimate Learning Transmission

This dissertation focused on how Indigenous literacy, as Storywork and storytelling, is a legitimate means of learning transmission for Native students. Storytelling transmission is the missing part of Western Education Systems that would enhance Indigenous intellectual learning styles and possibly close an achievement gap. McCardle and Beringer (2014) analyze policy designs that have contributed to narrowing the achievement gap for American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) learners. Their evidence-based, culturally sensitive practices include personal and cultural storytelling methods, such as digital stories and talking circles (p. 196). McCardle and Beringer also interviewed Shana Brown, a teacher at Broadview-Thomson, a kindergarten-through-8th-grade school in Seattle Public Schools, and the principal author of the "Since Time Immemorial" curriculum, about their experiences. Their work involved integrating personal storytelling to transform the development of the John McCoy (lulilaš) curriculum (OSPI, 2026).

The "Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington State" (JMLSTI) curriculum educates about the shared history among Washington State Tribes, including the Point Elliott and Medicine Creek Treaties, which encompass Lushootseed-speaking peoples. This narrative traces from the Tribal communities of Snohomish County to the Nisqually Tribe of North Thurston County. Brown's storytelling approach is a personal narrative component incorporated into the curriculum's development. The goal was to create a curriculum that honors Tribal leaders from various regions. As McCardle and Beringer (2014, p. 197) state, Brown's process demonstrates how their learning about the significance of cultural traditions and values empowers individuals through personal narratives, making these traditions accessible.

According to the American Institutes for Research (2023), data indicate that Indigenous students are geographically undercounted by approximately 70% within 23 states, which affects

the distribution of federal funds, specifically, \$675 million allocated to Native Education programs (p. 23). This undercounting has important implications, as it limits the support and resources available for Native Education initiatives.

Historical Background

According to Reyhner and Eder (2017), Superintendent of Indian Trades McKenny, who served for six years beginning in 1816, persuaded Congress to enact the Indian Civilization Act, which allocated \$10,000 annually to religious or other institutions that provided education and instruction to American Indian and Alaska Native children. Reyhner and Eder (2017) elucidate that this Act facilitated federal funding for missionary and military schools, thereby initiating a national policy of assimilation aimed at stripping Indigenous peoples of their cultures and languages. They further document how federal policies, under the guise of ‘civilizing’ Indigenous children, resulted in systemic assimilation; children were frequently forcibly removed from their families and communities, renamed, barred from speaking their native languages, and subjected to cultural erasure. These institutions intended to supplant Indigenous identities with Western cultural norms within an English-speaking society. The historical record corroborates the assertion that boarding schools were designed to serve the settler-colonial objective of eradicating Indigenous ways of being (Reyhner & Eder, 2017; Reyhner & Singh, 2010). Additionally, boarding schools have been recognized as a fundamental cause of intergenerational trauma within American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities.

Early on, federal schools implemented strict disciplinary measures and employed rote-learning techniques, whereby Native students memorized English vocabulary without comprehension and were frequently penalized for speaking their indigenous languages (Reyhner & Eder, 2017). These practices exemplified the process of Western assimilation and the

denigration of Indigenous pedagogies. The *Meriam Report* (Meriam, 1928) subsequently documented the federal government's mismanagement of Indian boarding schools, revealing widespread neglect and advocating for reforms that ultimately facilitated the integration of American Indian and Alaska Native students into public educational institutions.

In addition to physical and emotional trauma, boarding schools are also linked to the diminishment of Indigenous languages. Before the boarding school era, approximately 250 Indigenous languages were spoken across North America; presently, fewer than 150 persist, most of which are endangered (McCarty, 2003; Reyhner & Eder, 2017). Collectively, these studies illustrate how policies of assimilation in education contributed to the decline of Indigenous languages.

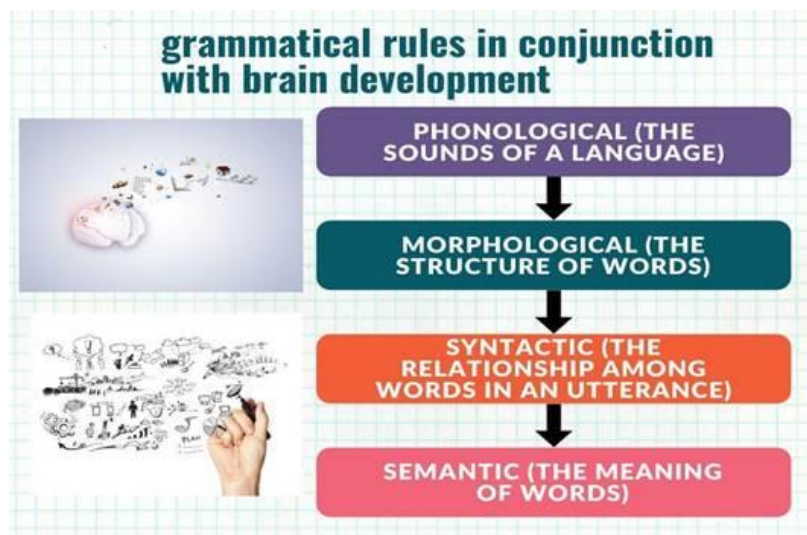
Language holds paramount importance for all individuals, for the Coast Salish Peoples, as well as the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian communities; languages and dialects serve as vital links connecting them to their lands, waters, and ancestral knowledge. Proficiency in English is likewise essential for effective reading and writing within academic and professional settings. Due to the assimilation policies enacted in the late 1800s, English has become the predominant language within the American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) community. Indigenous literacy, encompassing language skills and oral storytelling traditions, remains central to the construction of cultural identity (Brown, 1991; Grande, 2015; Jones & Singh, 2013; Shirley, 2017; Smith, 2019).

The U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) offers guidance and instructional resources in its publication, *Reading and Language Arts Curricula in Elementary and Secondary Education for American Indians and Alaska Natives*, to enhance literacy skills among AI/AN students. Brown (1991) proposed the Language Acquisition Theory (LAT), which asserts that all children

inherently possess the capacity to acquire language for communication purposes. According to this theory, children subconsciously assimilate grammatical rules in tandem with brain maturation, encompassing “phonological (the sounds of a language), morphological (the structure of words), syntactic (the relationship among words in an utterance), and semantic (the meaning of words)” (p. 2). It is essential to support children's access to learning in multiple languages, including their native tongue. As illustrated in Figure 1, language development is an ongoing learning process across Indigenous languages, including Tlingit, Haida, and Lushootseed. This flowchart delineates the relationship between language and identity.

Figure 1

Grammatical Rules in Conjunction with Brain Development



Note. This conceptual diagram illustrates the progression of language development from phonological awareness to semantic understanding. Created by the author using Canva.

Kelsey (2008) described oral and written language, including oral and origin stories, as Indigenous knowledge systems. This knowledge sustains community identity and values (Begay et al., 2021; Fernandes, n.d.; Hare, 2001; Kelsey, 2008; Williams, 2001). Through her Haudenosaunee narratives, Kelsey demonstrates that tribal language and Indigenous knowledge are interconnected with relationships to land and place, establishing a birthright to the land. Kelsey's work expands theoretical perspectives, such as Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork and Worl's (1998) at.oow framework. Storytelling is also integral to pedagogy that structures relational accountability. These frameworks regard oral stories and histories as vital resources that reinforce cultural continuity and literacy. In this regard, Kelsey's (2008) contribution enhances understanding of Indigenous literacy by emphasizing language as a living practice and a means of cultural preservation. Kelsey (2008) states, "Native American literature can teach those at the center because I am most concerned with privileging Native knowledges" (p. 7).

Brayboy (2005) offered an essential theoretical framework (p. 427) for examining the racialized and colonial conditions that influence Indigenous educational experiences, known as Tribal Critical Race Theory (TriCrit). Building on this foundation, Patel (2015) critiqued the continued reproduction of settler-colonial power structures within contemporary educational systems that marginalize Indigenous peoples, asserting that "settler colonialism is most finitely described as the ongoing need to erase Indigenous peoples" (p. 87). This phenomenon is observable in policies and practices that sustain disparities in academic achievement and graduation rates between White students and students of color, especially Native American and Alaska Native learners.

Patel (2015) underscored the significance of decolonizing educational research and re-envisioning schooling via Indigenous methodologies that emphasize relational accountability and sovereignty. Nevertheless, colonial logics persist within educational institutions, underscoring the necessity to dismantle existing frameworks that do not adequately support Indigenous students at federal, state, and local levels (Brayboy, 2005; Patel, 2015). Consequently, Indigenous-centered approaches must honor community knowledge, storytelling, and the right to self-determined education.

Indigenous Knowledges and Methodologies

This study is rooted in shared tribal cultural traditions, including ceremonies, stories, songs, and dances. Each teaching perpetuates the storytelling process across generations. The origin stories of the Raven and Salmon people are integral to this research, illustrating how transformative teachings facilitate the sharing, interpretation, and lived experience of Indigenous knowledge through pedagogies grounded in traditional ceremonies, storytelling, music, and dance. The oral histories of Salmon and Raven constitute our traditional narratives; salmon serve as our primary sustenance, and Raven is symbolically associated with the dissemination of stories of transformation.

Absolon (2022) characterized kaandossiwin as How We Come to Know, emphasizing Indigenous research methodologies. This encompasses relational metaphors about land, animals, rocks, and plant relatives, notably the cedar, which is of significant importance in daily life. In this research, carving was employed as a metaphor to examine Coast Salish and Indigenous meanings, with references to the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples of Alaska and Canada, as well as the Coast Salish tribes of Canada and Washington State. Inspired by Absolon's (2022)

utilization of a flower petal, I employed the Tlingit and Haida totem pole to conceptualize a holistic framework.

Carving holds significant importance among the Indigenous communities of the Coast Salish Peoples, serving as a symbol of family and being closely linked to oral histories and land origin narratives (see Figure 2). As a metaphor, carving exemplifies both a methodological and epistemological process within the formline literacy of the Indigenous Coast Salish Peoples. Totem poles, functioning as story poles, serve as a mode of documentation among the Tlingit, Haida, and Coast Salish peoples. Throughout this investigation, carving was used as an analogy for weaving, highlighting the familial connection to the craft, as our family tradition is rooted in it. Fathers, uncles, and cousins are recognized as master carvers. Fred Lauth Sr., a paternal figure, commenced his artistic education at the University of Washington, Seattle campus, where he studied under Marvin Oliver, an esteemed artist specializing in American Indian Studies with expertise in formline and carving. When Mr. Lauth began detailing the formlines (se), he spent hours practicing. Two years later, he acquired professional-grade paintbrushes, which significantly transformed the technique. Fred emerged as a master carver; his enterprise was known as Onehaidafrog. Fred Lauth, Sr., is of Haida descent; his moiety is Eagle, and he belongs to the frog clan. The Tlingit and Haida tribes are matrilineal societies in which the Eagle and Raven moieties are inherited through the maternal line and constitute the birthright of their offspring. The two principal moieties, Eagle/Wolf or Raven/Crow, are also relevant for matrimonial alliances (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1987; Worl, 1998). The Tlingit society, with origins dating back approximately 11,000 years, comprises two main moieties, Raven and Eagle (Wolf), along with clans and houses that are often named after various animals, depending on the kwan, or territorial area. The societal structure is matrilineal, indicating that an individual's

birthright lies within their mother's moiety. Marriage arrangements typically involve the father belonging to the opposite moiety; for instance, if the mother belongs to the Raven moiety, the father must belong to the Eagle (Wolf) moiety.

I am pleased to present myself as the offspring of the Haida Eagle Frog. Mr. Fred was born in Ketchikan and was raised in Hydaburg. He graduated from Ketchikan High School. Subsequently, he served as a foreman at the Ketchikan Spruce Mill located in the downtown area (see Figure 3). He later relocated to our family to pursue higher education at the University of Washington, where he obtained a business degree in 1985.

Figure 2

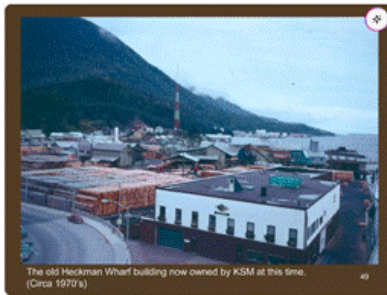
Formline Artwork Representing Indigenous Cultural Design



Note. Photograph of an Indigenous formline artwork by Fred Lauth Sr., displayed in a gallery at the University of Washington Hospital. Photograph by Daphyne Albee, 2025. Used with permission.

Figure 3

Heckman Wharf and Ketchikan Spruce Mill Operations, Circa 1970s



-Statement of the Problem

According to the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) report card data, the high school graduation rates for the 2023–2024 academic year among American Indian and Alaska Native students were lower than those of other racial and ethnic groups. According to the OSPI report card, disparities are evidenced by a 19-point gap in graduation rates between Native students (69.9%) and White students (89.1%), as illustrated in. Similarly, the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (2023/2024) reported comparable outcomes in Alaska, with an 18-point disparity between Alaska Native/American Indian students (65.3%) and White students (84.1%), as depicted in Figure 5. These disparities highlight ongoing inequities within public education systems and raise concerns regarding access to effective and culturally grounded literacy instruction for Indigenous students. Research suggests that literacy engagement, a culturally responsive curriculum, storytelling, and relational teaching practices may support student participation, a sense of belonging, and academic success in educational settings. Therefore, this study examines how we can allocate resources to enable public education systems, Indigenous educators, and Indigenous community leaders to

collaborate in implementing culturally grounded Indigenous literacy practices that support Native Learners’ English reading and writing development.

Figure 4
Washington State OSPI Graduation and Grade 4 Language Arts Outcomes by Race (2023–24)

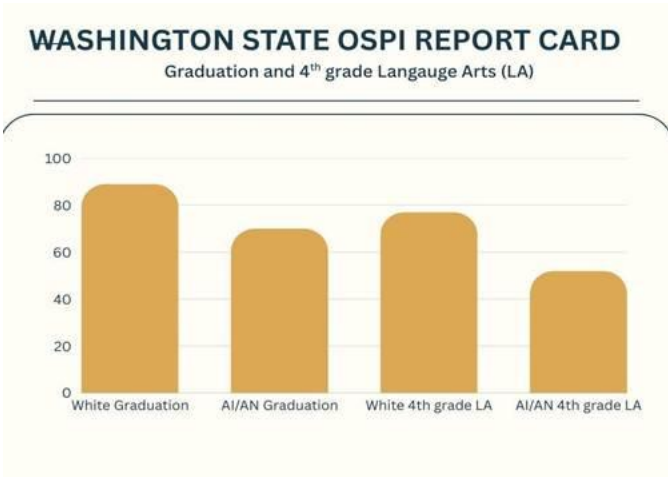
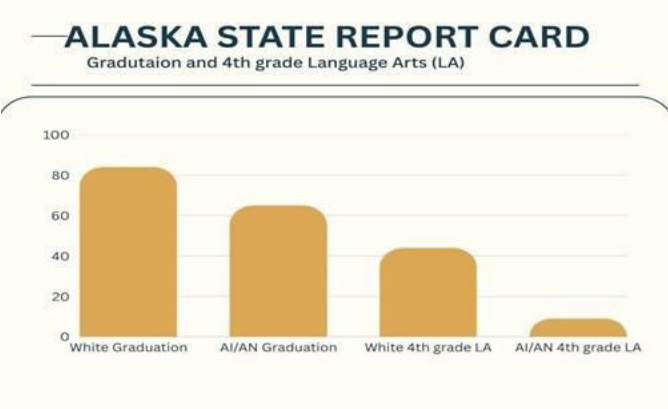


Figure 5
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development Graduation and Grade 4 English Language Arts Outcomes by Race (2023–24)



Purpose of the Study

This study explored how public education systems and Indigenous educators can collaborate to implement culturally grounded literacy practices, including storytelling and Indigenous language practices, to support Indigenous students' development in English reading and writing. This study also investigated how the Nisqually Head Start system, along with both Native and non-Native educators, facilitates literacy, reading, and writing skills in English and Native languages, with particular emphasis on cultural considerations. The guiding research question was: How do public education systems and Indigenous educators and leaders collaborate to implement culturally grounded literacy practices, such as storytelling, to support Indigenous students' English reading and writing development? At Nisqually Head Start, I collected testimonies and observations from a diverse group of educators, including teachers, administrators, parents, and community members.

Scope of the Study

The geographic focus of this study was the Nisqually Tribe, where I, the Family Service Coordinator for Nisqually Head Start, am based. Early learning teachers, along with parents and community members, were targeted for participation in classroom observation and testimonies of Indigenous education. The second target was the Tlingit and Haida Tribal elders, from whom participants' testimony about the culture was gathered. Archibald's (2018) mixed-methods approach was used to collect stories using Indigenous Storywork.

Specific Aims:

1. To understand how teachers introduce cultural competency into classrooms.
2. To understand how Indigenous literacy is incorporated into teachers' professional development developed by Indigenous communities.

3. To understand how to legitimize storytelling and language for learning transmission for Native students.
4. To understand how a Tribal community's Indigenous leaders take the lead for Indigenous education with public education systems?

Significance of Study

Literacy is a crucial determinant of academic achievement, graduation, and dropout rates. Instances of push-out phenomena through racial literacy are substantiated (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Morris, 2016). Ladson-Billings (2006) contends that educational debt exacerbates historical inequities, recharacterizing this issue as the achievement gap, a systemic process within public schools that disproportionately affects students of color. For Native students, this issue is pertinent to the erasure of Tribal history within the curriculum, English literacy assessments, disciplinary measures, and microaggressions—all of which contribute to the marginalization and potential removal of students from the educational environment.

The OSPI 2023-24 Language Arts (LA) assessment for 4th grade reveals an achievement disparity between Native and White students. Native students' language and reading proficiency stood at 52.5%, compared with 77.2% for White students, indicating a 25% gap in literacy outcomes, as depicted in Figure 4. Likewise, the 2023-24 Alaska STAR assessment results for 4th-grade English/Language Arts underscore a 9.3% discrepancy in literacy proficiency, with 35% of Native students achieving proficiency compared to 44.3% of White students. An even more pronounced gap of 35 percentage points exists in 4th-grade Language Arts outcomes, as demonstrated in Figure 5. These statewide outcomes offer a perspective for decolonizing literacy development to promote academic success among Indigenous students. Consequently, this

research emphasizes the importance of developing professional development initiatives to support Native students' academic achievement.

Key insights from this study include the ongoing need for community collaboration, the wisdom of elders, and active participation in the Indigenization of curriculum development through Indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, the comparison between Western and Indigenous ideologies is exemplified by the implementation of Storywork.

Dissertation Overview

This study examined how Native and non-Native educators use, or do not use, Indigenous cultural responsiveness to support the success of Native and all students in English reading and writing. Additionally, it identified areas for improvement to enhance students' prospects in higher education and careers. Chapter One was designed to demonstrate how Indigenous literacy, such as storytelling and Indigenous language, supports Native students' academic achievement in English reading and writing. Chapter Two includes the literature review and examines Archibald's (2018) Storywork methodology and Worl's theoretical frameworks, as articulated by Davidson and Davidson (2018) in the context of Indigenous education systems. Worl's (1988) framework incorporates the Haida cultural stories and Tlingit and Haida literacy. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer's (1987) Tlingit clan stories, including my *táakw.aaneidí* clan story, written in Tlingit and English, is also discussed. The languages of Lushootseed, Tlingit, and Haida are considered. The concepts of Land as Literacy, as discussed by Tuck & McKenzie (2014) and Segrest (2018), an enrolled Muckleshoot citizen who taught Indigenous food harvesting, are also included. Indigenous sovereignty, as articulated by Vizenor (2008), defines survivance as a means of deflecting victimhood. This discussion will lead to Halcomb's (2023) exploration of teacher competency within the classroom, including the hiring of Indigenous teachers. The

theoretical framework and methodology for this study are presented in Chapter Three. Chapter Four presents' findings from interviews, observations, and data analysis conducted at Nisqually Head Start, as well as an interview with a Tlingit and Haida community leader participant. Chapter Five discusses these findings and their implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

“There is a Haida teaching that states ‘we do not inherit the land from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children’” (Styres, 2019, p. 24)

The focus of this study was the exploration of Indigenous literacy. To achieve this, I employed Worl’s (1998) Tlingit at.oow theoretical framework, which emphasizes Indigenous Storywork within relational and cultural practices in early learning contexts. Rooted in Indigenous methodologies, the study examined how both Native and non-Native educators support Native students in English literacy, including reading and writing, as well as in Indigenous literature that interconnects story, land, and languages to reinforce their identities within their communities’ epistemologies and ontologies. Furthermore, this research aimed to reconcile Western academic expectations by integrating a respectful, community-centered Indigenous knowledge system.

This study was guided by this research question: How do public education systems and Indigenous educators and leaders collaborate to implement culturally grounded literacy practices, such as storytelling, to support Indigenous students’ English reading and writing development? This question was positioned to examine the education systems and Indigenous community-based approaches that contribute to Indigenous literacy.

This chapter examines scholarly literature on Indigenous perspectives on land, art, and oral storytelling in both English and Indigenous languages, within the framework of Indigenous pedagogical paradigms. Subsequent discussions concerning Western educational systems complement it. The study was guided by Archibald’s (2008) Storywork methodology and Worl’s (1998) at.oow framework. This research investigates how culturally rooted pedagogical practices

enhance the roles of community leaders, educators, families, and elders in fostering the success of young Native learners.

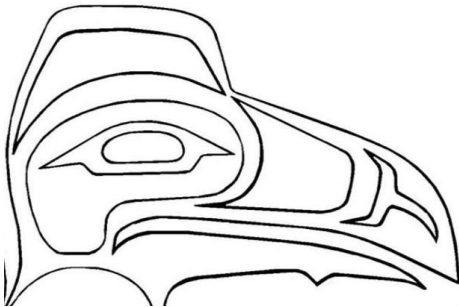
Indigenous literacy necessitates consideration of historical and cultural factors that continue to shape Native learners' experiences within educational systems and communities. Despite the enduring impacts of colonialism, this chapter begins by examining Indigenous knowledge systems, literacy, and learning. The literature review in this section focuses on Indigenous pedagogy and the literacy of stories and storytelling, which are recognized as Indigenous knowledge systems predating Western education. It begins with the work of Davidson and Davidson (2018), a father-and-daughter team of Indigenous scholars from Haida Gwaii, Canada, who establish a framework for teaching and educational practices aligned with Indigenous literature. This framework incorporates Haida cultural stories and utilizes representations such as U and Ovoids in Haida artwork and totem poles, exemplified in Figure 6. Davidson and Davidson (2018) highlight the importance of learning through observation and relational participation, involving watching and listening across seasonal cycles. This approach aligns with traditional Indigenous education, which emphasizes learning through active contribution.

An illustration of this is the way Native students are instructed to serve elders and guests with food and gifts during a ceremonial event, such as a potlatch. In this context, youth gain knowledge through oral traditions, including stories, songs, and dances (Archibald, 2008; Davidson & Davidson, 2018; Worl, 2012). The practices of the Tlingit and Haida peoples encompass learning through protocols, such as understanding appropriate behavior and speech during ceremonies. This constitutes a form of ethical literacy that imparts understanding of the significance of relational obligations. The work of Davidson and Davidson also corresponds with

research on Indigenous literacy, especially regarding storytelling and language. Davidson and Davidson (2018) employed sk'as'a, the principles of ancestral knowledge rooted in Haida cultural practices, to illustrate how the transmission of daughter and father's teachings "knowledge with the community and utilized these principles in the feasts and potlatches he hosted to disseminate his knowledge" (p. 6).

Figure 6

Formline Design Illustration by Haida Artist Fred Lauth Jr., who is the brother of the researcher, gave permission. To present in this study



Note: The formline design drawing is attributed to Haida artist Fred Lauth Jr. and was shared via Facebook. Formline design is a fundamental visual language of Northwest Coast Indigenous art, used to depict animals, crests, and clan histories through ovoids, U-forms, and S-forms. The image was retrieved from Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=275541049298050&set=a.275541082631380>. Notable Tlingit and Haida artists, including Fred Lauth Jr., are recognized for their craftsmanship and dedication to the traditions of Northwest Coast art. Permission for this use was graciously granted by the researcher's brother, Fred Lauth Jr.

Lasting Impacts of Western Education on Indigenous Peoples

Scholars recognize Indian boarding schools as a pivotal factor contributing to issues within Indian education. Reyhner (2015) contextualized the boarding school system as a governmental strategy aimed at cultural genocide, formalized through the Indian Civilization Act Fund of 1819. Reyhner argued Indigenous literacy education should transcend this legacy by integrating culturally relevant, tribal-rooted curricula. Research shows how these institutions inflicted historical trauma and cultural genocide upon American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities via forced assimilation (Halcomb, 2023; Morgan, 2009; Reyhner, 2015). Government officials forcibly removed Native children from their families and imposed penalties for speaking their languages, resulting in significant cultural and linguistic erosion. Similarly, Halcomb (2023) and Absolon (2011) leveraged intergenerational narratives to underscore the enduring impacts of boarding-school trauma. Their accounts demonstrate how personal and familial healing frequently involves revisiting and reclaiming these suppressed histories. As Reyhner (2015) noted, mainstream educational curricula, developed for “middle-class white children” (p. 51), remain unsuitable for Indigenous students, underscoring the importance of Indigenous authors and materials that reflect their lived experiences. Regrettably, the histories of these boarding schools are predominantly absent from Western historical records.

Importance of Indigenous Languages and Dialects

Marian Peratrovich Lauth (refer to Figure 7) was born in Ketchikan, Alaska, and was raised in the village of Klawock, Alaska. Eventually, Marian relocated to Ketchikan and completed their high school education. Although Marian did not graduate, they diligently worked to obtain their General Educational Development (GED) credential. Marian had a strong foundation in English and could read, although their writing was phonetic, which was acceptable

for communication. For instance, Marian would write "turn off the lite" instead of "light." No one ever corrected them, as their intended meaning was always understandable. Marian and Jan served as leaders of our Haida Laas dance group, despite their Tlingit heritage. They were protected by our Haida elders, who were the principal leaders of the dance group. I share this story to illustrate the significance of language and culture to Native peoples and communities.

Figure 7

Marian Peratrovich Lauth and Fred Lauth Sr. in Traditional Regalia



Note. This photo shows Marian Peratrovich Lauth and her husband, Fred Lauth Sr., participating in a cultural gathering while wearing traditional Northwest Coast regalia. Their efforts have significantly contributed to the continuation of Haida cultural practices, including dance, storytelling, and community cultural education through the Haida Laas Dance Group.

Photograph by Karen Elliott.

Importance of Language to Children's Development

McIvor (2005) contended that language plays a critical role in the optimal development of all children; it facilitates communication, enables self-expression, and enhances knowledge acquisition (p. 22). Research by McIvor (2005) revealed that acquiring their Indigenous language

empowers American Indian learners to participate actively and progress within their cultural contexts, fostering a stronger sense of cultural identity. Early learning and childcare professionals should identify the languages spoken in the child's household to assess the child's exposure to Indigenous languages. According to McIvor, parental involvement is essential in early education and childcare settings for understanding Indigenous language methodologies, thereby enabling parents to incorporate these practices into their home environments. Nonetheless, some parents may lack fluency in their Indigenous language.

As a conventional aspect of language acquisition, many Native learners tend to intersperse multiple languages (McIvor, 2005; Mehmood et al., 2025; Romero-Little, 2010). During the process of acquiring a second language, parents must experiment to facilitate their child's active development and learning in the earliest stages of life. Social interactions are pivotal in shaping early neural development. Indigenous culture is rooted in relational learning paradigms. Archibald (2008) and Worl (1998) contend that languages are cultivated through the transmission of cultural knowledge within families and communities, primarily through relationships and storytelling (Kuhl, 2011; McIvor, 2005).

Esther Shea taught the Tlingit language at Valley Park Elementary School in Ketchikan, Alaska. According to Serrill (1994), Esther was a Tlingit instructor who imparted knowledge of culture, songs, and language. Esther was raised in a boarding school where speaking her native language often resulted in punishment (duration 7:25). Forty years later, Esther was inspired to reconnect with her cultural roots. Esther embarked on a mission to revitalize her culture and became an educator in Tlingit language instruction at elementary schools (duration 9:22). Shotridge Studio (2026). Esther Shea, a respected bearer of Tlingit traditions and knowledge, served as a prominent Matriarch of the Teikweidee (Brown Bear Clan) of the Taantakwaan

(Tongass Tribe) from Ketchikan, Alaska. Esther dedicated their life to teaching the language, songs, and values integral to Tlingit traditional life in Southeast Alaska. Esther's Tlingit name signifies "the basket with the sun shining through it" (np). The researcher had the esteemed opportunity to learn Tlingit traditions and culture from Gram Esther, including language at Valley Park and song and dance at the Ketchikan Indian Center. Audrey Rowan, a Tlingit woman and the researcher's grandmother, who passed away when the researcher was five years old, has no memories of traditional teachings.

Kimmerer (2013), a biologist with extensive plant knowledge within the Western view of objectivity, came to realize that, in their Anishinaabe language, plants hold meanings beyond mere objectivity. Their example is the word Puhpowee, which translates as "the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight" (p. 49). Speaking Anishinaabe became significant to them, as speaking Tlingit and Haida is to me. My Náanaa (Grandmother in Haida), Olive Ross Natkong, is my father's mother. Náanaa taught me my first Haida words, such as "dollar digisata," meaning "give me a dollar," which was spoken whenever my father entered the house. Náanaa was from Hydaburg, Alaska, and was fluent in Haida. I recall hearing her speak, and I feel sorrow that my children will never have the opportunity to hear the language spoken. By their great-grandparents. These examples again underscore the importance of language to Native people.

Vi Hilbert (taqʷšəblu), a distinguished figure in their own right, was born on July 24, 1918, in the Upper Skagit. Vi was born into a Lushootseed-speaking family. Vi was an author, storyteller, and a language professor at the University of Washington. Vi's obituary described them as "... was one woman with one mission: The preservation of their native Lushootseed language and culture" (*Skagit River Journal*, 2008, n. p.). Vi was a natural culture bearer for the

Puget Sound tribes. According to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at the United Nations (n.d.), Indigenous peoples' duties are described as “Keepers of knowledge,” as being connected to their identity, traditional values, and knowledge. Vi Hilbert’s teaching is grounded in Indigenous literacy rooted in language and storytelling. For them, language is not just a form of communication but is embedded in a worldview, and learning is passed down through generations within a community in a living form.

Indigenous Approaches to Teaching and Learning Potlatch

The Potlatch *ku.éex’* (or *koo.éex’*) is a ceremonial gathering of the Tlingit and Haida peoples. However, in contemporary practice, the celebration continues until the hall closes. The protocol observed during a potlatch facilitates marriages and resolves disputes among other tribes and families (Kan, 2015). Potlatches are also integral to ceremonies conducted upon an individual's passing. Historically, a moiety would host the Potlatch. “Ritual services offered by the opposites throughout the entire mortuary cycle placed the mourners in the position of receivers indebted to their givers” (Kan, 2015, p. 205). Present-day potlatches include the moiety of the deceased's opposite clan and witnesses, who are honored with naming and memorial ceremonies; furthermore, potlatches serve as demonstrations of wealth and prestige.

Throughout history, the potlatch has functioned as an educational forum. Individuals traveled from one village to another to maintain kinship ties and, most importantly, to participate in relational gatherings. The community not only imparts singing and dance performances but also ensures that traditional songs and dances are connected to specific clans and their stories. Ritual attire, including robes, headbands, headdresses, and carved masks, signifies clan identity and is complemented by formline artwork representing the clan or moiety. Additionally, this event

serves as a platform for oral and historical storytelling, helping to safeguard our rich cultural heritage.

According to Davidson and Davidson (2018), the Canadian government sought to prohibit the potlatch in 1884 on religious grounds. “For many settlers, missionaries, and Canadian government officials in the late 1800s, potlatches appeared chaotic, pagan, economically irrational, and posed a threat to their perception of order” (Baird, 2026, n. p.). Baird elucidated that Christians failed to comprehend that it was a community governed by law and order, with ceremonies centered on history and identity, especially in societies that engaged in gift-giving for naming, marriage, memorials, and adoption. The potlatch also functioned as a form of governance, relying on the Kwan (a Tlingit term for land and regions). The territories and waters of Salmon Nation encompass the Northwest coastal communities of Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Haida Gwaii, Kaigani Haida, Tsimshian Skeena River, and Metlakatla (Met) Nisga’a Nation (Wolf & Zuckerman, 2003; Woody, 2003). Each tribe, clan, house, and moiety possesses its own governance structure. The Eagle and Raven Moieties are designated for matrimonial purposes. Tlingit customary belief holds that the moiety is the child's birthright, transmitted through a matrilineal system. The two moieties are Raven/Crow and Eagle/Wolf. Women are expected to select husbands from the opposite moiety.

We take pleasure in singing our clan songs and in enjoying the freedom to wear our traditional regalia. Our clan is responsible for serving food and distributing gifts, which include hand towels, artwork, apples, and oranges. Unfortunately, due to building space policies, we now need to schedule ceremonies within specific timeframes, so they must be held between 11 a.m. and 10 p.m., rather than our customary two-week duration.

The Potlatch as Indigenous Pedagogy

Within the framework of educational sovereignty, Indigenous pedagogies frequently incorporate the concept of survivance. Traditions and cultural competence are among the primary strengths of Indigenous educators in instructing American Indian and Alaska Native students. Vizenor (2008) emphasized that Survivance denotes an intergenerational link to culture and traditional knowledge. How might Indigenous teachers integrate culture into their pedagogical approaches and curricular content? The potlatch is a pedagogical practice within Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork framework, which connects storytelling to educational processes. Storywork entails learning through observation and relational participation, examining how instructors employ cultural competence in their classrooms. This approach to Storywork aligns closely with research on Indigenous literacy, storytelling, and language.

Clan Stories

Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1987) presented a curated collection of Tlingit clan narratives written in both Tlingit and English, reflecting a cultural heritage comparable to that of the Haida and Tsimshian peoples. The Tlingit language is linguistically distinct from the Haida and Tsimshian languages. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer meticulously selected several Tlingit clan stories for translation into English, thereby enabling the communities to analyze stories concerning creation, law, and the significance of life and belonging to the Táakw.aaneidí clan. The Heenya Kwan (land) clan story is provided in both Tlingit and English, facilitating a deeper understanding of Native identity. Clan stories constitute a vital element of land history, transmitted orally through generations by the clans to their Tribal members and descendants,

which can be compared and contrasted with the Potlatch as an educational and cultural institution.

Personal origin narratives hold significant importance in transmitting the cultural knowledge and teachings inherent to our family lineages and ancestors, specifically the táakw.aaneidí clan. These narratives are intrinsically linked to their traditional contexts of narration. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1987) recounted the story of Dukt'ootl' (refer to Figure 8), an ancestor whose history extends approximately 12,000 years into the past. The narrative is set in a winter village inhabited by strong individuals who are trained to fortify their bodies and spirits. Within this community, an uncle and his nephew, both esteemed leaders, resided. The uncle led hunting expeditions; during one, they discovered an island where a large sea lion rested on a rock. The uncle, renowned for strength, endeavored to wrestle the sea lion; however, the animal retaliated by throwing them into the air, killing them. The nephew, Dukt'ootl', who engaged in silent nocturnal training as others slept, later confronted the sea lion and tore its fin in half to avenge the uncle, as depicted in Figure 8. The following Tlingit narrative is provided below.

Dukt'ootl' Taakw K'wát'i x'éidáx sh kalneek

yóo wé, henyaa áwé, yéi duwasáakw áwé du.uxx'un.

taakw.aani. áwé tlél tlax woch een yan ka~wla.aax wáanáx sáwé ~óo~ ayawdutItseen.

gwál tla~ eh'áagu sh kalneegi, áeh áwé tlél óonaa ~oosti ~a tlél gayéis' .awé tle yéi

~wajée nuch wé taan áwé aax has jiwtuk wé at~á sákw. áwé tléinax káa áwé. ~a lwéit'

yóo duwasáakw. naa sháadei hánix sitee. yáa du kéilk' ku.aa wé a ~oo aach yéi sáakw

nuch ~oos~áawu yá~ yatee. tlél daa.it~ooshgóok.m tle k'idéin ku.oo tnáx kuwudzitee. - --

awé eh'ul ~eena.éiji áwé tle héendei ana.áteh. wé du káak yaa ~aa shugaguteh.sagu yá~

~aa yayik du.a~ji nuch héendei yáa ana.ádi. awé hu ~u.a tlél ~aa yáa ul~'eiyéech áwé,
 eh'a góot héeni yoo uwagut. yan awu~éix'u áwé héendei nagutch.

ch'a wáa sáwé ayagwált tle ya~ yaa ayanaljá~.tle y60 kindei woogoot wé du káak
 aawajági taan tlein a ginkáa wch~aa~.ch'a gigaa kindei y60 ya~ ash siné. tléik'!tle yá a
 geen tle yáa yá woosh tkán y60 awusneyi áwé w6oshdá~ akaawas'éil' .tle aawajá~.
 aagáa áwé tsá yá át ~in aa taan a xoot jiwgtut.tle h6och'! (Strong Man, told by Frank G.
 Johnson), (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1987, p. 138)

Figure 8

Dukt'ootl (Strong Man) Totem Pole Depicting the Tlingit Hero Engaging in the Rending of the Sea Lion



Note: The Black Skin Post illustrates the Tlingit hero dukt'ootl, also referred to as the Strong Man, who clandestinely trained to seek retribution for the hero's uncle's demise by killing the sea lion responsible. This carving portrays the moment when dukt'ootl tears apart the sea lion with bare hands. Photograph courtesy of Jay Brabant, shared by the *West Coast Indigenous and Histories* Facebook page (<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/cur.../Tlingit/WhaleHouse/part2.html>).

Storytelling is rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems transmitted across generations (Archibald, 2008; Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1987; Worl, 2014). This aligns effectively with Worl's at.oow perspective, which illustrates intangible cultural expressions, such as stories, songs, and dances, as the property rights of their respective clans. This is an exemplary example of how storytelling can be integrated into Indigenous literacy frameworks.

Indigenous Dances

Just as language holds significance for Native peoples, so too do our Indigenous dances. Robert Davidson is a notable influence on our Haida Laas dance group in Seattle (see Figure 9). The majority of our families originate from the Seattle Haida Heritage Foundation, which was a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization serving as a social and political entity with a dance ensemble that once comprised the largest number of dance members within our community. My mother, Marian Lauth, was one of the leaders during that period. Following a disagreement among members, two families departed to establish a new dance group, the Haida Laas Dance Group. Fred and Marian Lauth, together with our long-term friends Jan and Robert Peele (Sadutes), helped found this new organization. We were profoundly honored when Robert Davidson bestowed traditional songs and dances from Haida Gwaii upon our group. He recorded these songs for us and meticulously transcribed the lyrics in phonetic Haida to facilitate proper learning. Our initial focus was on practicing the songs, which grounded us in the language, pronunciation, and cultural significance. Only after mastering the songs did we incorporate the dance movements. We rehearse once a week and perform mainly in educational settings and for other Native organizations. This was driven by our intention to remain rooted in the relationality of sharing our culture with respect and dedication to learning. Currently, our dance group consists of approximately twenty members. We have declined invitations to perform for personal

or commercial purposes, as our dances are not intended as entertainment; we do not serve as a “dog and pony show.” Our cultural endeavors are regarded as sacred and relational.

Figure 9

The Haida Laas Dance Group positioned in front of Fred Lauth’s carving at Spruce Elementary within the Edmonds School District



Note. Members of the Haida Laas Dance Group assembled in front of a Northwest Coast totem pole during a cultural event. The Haida Laas Dance Group was established by Fred and Marian Lauth, together with family and community members, to promote Haida culture through song, dance, and regalia in educational and Indigenous community contexts. Photograph by Karen Elliott.

Land as Literacy

Each tribe leaves its mark on the land, not as owners but as chosen peoples, accountable for all living and non-living entities within that kwan, the designated territory, and for the ancestral narratives associated with the location. Facilitating outdoor classroom experiences is highly advantageous for educating students about their surrounding environment and

community. Segrest (2018), a registered Muckleshoot citizen and an authority on harvesting food in accordance with Indigenous dietary protocols, advocates that families harvest their own food. Such practices enable students and educators to integrate place-based learning into their social interactions by engaging with objects such as rocks and fostering reciprocal relationships with animals and plant relatives (Segrest, 2018). According to Tuck & McKenzie (2014), rigorous place-based research should encompass “land and material, embodied and placed data, memory and historical data, location and mobility, accountability to the community” (p. 101).

O’Harran (2011) presented contemporary Lushootseed language, exemplified by the award-winning film “History is Unwritten,” a senior project undertaken by Tulalip students. This work demonstrates the Indigenous relationship to land and identity, providing a visual and audio narrative that embodies the community. The use of language immersion through videos illustrates a juxtaposition of tradition and contemporary Indigenous literacy, aligning with Archibald’s (2008) Storywork methodology and Worl’s (1998) at.oow theoretical frameworks.

Indigenizing the Curriculum

Integrating Washington State history into educational curricula will foster a positive sense of identity among Native students, thereby helping them develop confidence as Native learners from Head Start through public schooling. This can be achieved by incorporating land-based and Indigenous knowledge systems. Such an approach underscores the significance of “becoming aware of our own peoples’ distinct beliefs about knowledge that are specific to place” (Windchief & San Pedro, 2019, p. 57). Furthermore, Chatto (2025) contends that Indigenous education is fundamentally rooted in land, grounded in the normative frameworks of Indigenous intellectual traditions.

Halcomb (2023) discusses strategies for educators to decolonize and indigenize their classrooms, emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy and the integration of Indigenous epistemologies. Halcomb characterizes culturally responsive teaching as an awareness of cultural diversity and the implementation of culturally pertinent, diverse methodologies. “Culturally responsive teaching should commence in teacher preparation courses by challenging inequity and its interconnectedness” (Halcomb, 2023, p. 2). Similarly, Reyhner (2015) advised educators to avoid employing texts that reinforce stereotypes, such as works by Mark Twain or Disney’s Pocahontas. Morgan (2009) underscored the significance of understanding students’ cultural perspectives, noting that “teachers need to understand the way Native American students are likely to perceive the world if they are seriously interested in improving the education of this group” (p. 10). Halcomb (2023), a citizen of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla, recommended that teachers, from the perspective of Indigenous scholars, incorporate culturally responsive materials for AI/AN students as Native educators. Halcomb emphasized that culturally responsive teaching occurs when history and contemporary issues are integrated into students’ cultural contexts. Halcomb asserts that addressing these issues will alter the power dynamics within pedagogical designs: “This creates a sense of belonging and makes their classrooms more engaging and exciting to the students” (p. 70). Collectively, these scholars highlight the necessity for culturally grounded pedagogical practices that honor and reflect Native students’ lived experiences.

Nisqually Head Start John McCoy (Iulilaš) Since Time Immemorial Curriculum

The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Office of Native Education (ONE) provides current information regarding tribal and urban education in Washington State. A variety of resources are available, including the OSPI (n.d.) John McCoy

(lulilaš) Since Time Immemorial (JMLSTI) Curriculum, which SB 5433 authorized for school districts to incorporate into social studies and tribal languages. These lesson plans, organized by grade level, are prepared for immediate use. Holt (2016) and Holtyn (2018) examine the significance of authentic history and demonstrate how the JMLSTI curriculum can foster cultural competency within educational settings.

Nisqually Tribal Education respectfully acknowledged the contributions of Billy Frank, Jr., and Chief Leschi as prominent historical figures within their community. Billy Frank Jr. is recognized as an activist who spearheaded the “Fish Wars” in Washington State. The short film titled *sčədadxʷ* (salmon), featuring Billy Frank, Jr., presents an animated representation aimed at raising awareness of the river through the narrator salmon's narrative, which depicts the pristine environment, the Coast Salish peoples, settlers who migrated to the lands, habitat degradation, and the collective worldview that emphasizes collaborative efforts to preserve our salmon (Salmon Defense, 2017).

Sample Head Start Lesson Plan

In the OSPI ONE JMLSTI curriculum, you can select Lesson Two: Salmon Life Cycle Rocks, which is an illustrative lesson plan designed for implementation in the Nisqually Head Start classroom. This pedagogical document provides detailed step-by-step instructions for creating the salmon life-cycle rocks. The sequence of the salmon's life cycle is outlined, from the egg stage to maturity. The initial step involves assembling the requisite materials, including stones, scissors for cutting images, hodgepodge glue, and a brush. The procedure entails cleaning the rock, positioning the image on the smooth surface, dipping the brush in glue, and applying it to affix the image to the rock. Additionally, the lesson plan includes a letter addressed to families that educators or instructors can customize before delivering the lesson (OSPI, 2026).

Indigenous Languages and Cultures as Teaching Tools

On the Tlingit and Haida Facebook pages, there is a post about a Tlingit immersion class celebrating Valentine's Day. This post references a lesson taught using the Tlingit word “iḡsḡxán” (meaning “I love you”). The post shares that the Tlingit immersion preschoolers enjoyed a tea party with parents, ate frosted cookies, and made various crafts (Tlingit and Haida Facebook Page, 2025). The video accompanying the post begins with a young Tlingit student saying, “Happy Valentine's Day.” The teacher responds with, “iḡsḡxán” (I love you). Other students recited this phrase with their families. The lesson concludes with a traditional Tlingit drum-and-song performance. This is an example of cultural teachers fostering an environment in which students learn to sing and dance in Tlingit.

Non-Native educators may find inspiration in this example to incorporate cultural elements into their instructional environments. Nonetheless, embedding culture within academic settings is a complex endeavor that necessitates considerable time and effort. Formulating tailored plans for 25 students based on individual experiences can be challenging; however, district-level support and professional development opportunities for educators working with AI/AN students can augment their capacity to support Native learners through culturally responsive practices. Halcomb (2023) emphasized that “future educators may benefit from understanding how these faculty members began to Indigenize their teaching praxis” (p. 29). Furthermore, Halcomb (2023) indicates that Tribal Sovereignty can function as a healing space within the educational system to foster intellectual development among AI/AN learners, who are envisioned as “future doctors, educators, and policymakers so they can help create a world where we are connected, loving, and live in a just society” (Halcomb, 2023, p. 29).

Including the History and Impact of Boarding Schools in the Curriculum

Research Question: How do public education systems and Indigenous educators and leaders collaborate to implement culturally grounded literacy practices, such as storytelling, to support Indigenous students' academic achievements in their English reading and writing development? This question focuses on Indigenous literacy in relation to mainstream teachers who do not incorporate cultural components into their classroom environments or instructional materials. Many Indigenous teachers naturally integrate cultural elements into their pedagogical approaches and resources. This pedagogical distinction is evident in mainstream education, which depends on the district's commitment to incorporating AI/AN history and contemporary issues into professional development initiatives to support Native learners' academic development. Healing from historical traumas, such as those associated with boarding schools, constitutes the initial step for Native teachers and students to advance with Indigenous pedagogies. Non-native teachers should include the history of boarding schools in their curricula for all students. It is time to reveal the true AI/AN history as part of the United States' history before it transforms into mythology. Consequently, this historical context of Indigenous education warrants exposure and teaching within the United States educational system.

Issues and Concerns Impacting the Teaching of Indigenous Children and Youth

Lack of Indigenous Teachers

According to Schaeffer (2021), most teachers in the United States (80%) are Caucasian. To decolonize or indigenize educational environments, it is necessary to increase the number of Indigenous educators. The deficiency of Indigenous teachers within educational institutions remains a considerable concern. The presence of Indigenous educators in public schools would likely confine their roles to decolonizing or indigenizing their respective classrooms. Smith et al. (2011) assert that time limitations imposed by standard curriculum planning hinder teachers from

integrating Indigenous-focused content into their instruction. As Smith et al. observe, teachers "we attend conferences, are introduced to valuable resources, feel motivated, and then Monday arrives" (pp. 6-7).

The absence of an Indigenous education system may be a factor for Native learners, resulting in some students dropping out of high school. Even after attaining higher levels of education, Native individuals continue to face significant barriers. For instance, graduates with teaching degrees often encounter racism within public schools and may be hindered in their efforts to decolonize or indigenize their classrooms and instructional materials (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Todd-Breland, 2022). Indigenous educators should serve their communities by practicing their cultural traditions and authentic pedagogical methods tailored for AI/AN students. Moreover, Indigenous teachers are well-positioned to provide professional development that equips educators to teach Native American and Alaska Native students effectively. Alternatively, school districts should support educators in integrating cultural elements, thereby enriching students' diverse worldviews.

What would classrooms look like if we employed Indigenous educators to teach AI/AN students? Reflecting upon the pronouncement of our Native elders, "We know how to teach our children" (Conversation with Tlingit elders, 2000), how might we enhance the support for Native teachers in the decolonization and indigenization of classrooms? Absolon (2022) argues that traditional ways of knowing for Indigenous teachers functioning as researchers can enrich pedagogies rooted in their tribal traditions. Absolon's (2022) framework provides a "pathway for researchers, whether they be students, community practitioners, proposal writers, or knowledge seekers" (p. 3). Native educators must deconstruct colonized paradigms of learning to reintroduce their culture, thereby better serving AI/AN students in educational settings. Absolon

observed that her Anishinaabe identity has had “cultural, political, social, and spiritual effects in my life” (p. 19).

Teachers’ Cultural Competency

According to Morgan (2009), “One of the problems that Native students face is that districts ignore the value of cultural diversity groups’ learning styles or the culture of their student population” (p. 5). In response, it is important to explore why teachers in public and private schools, from kindergarten through 12th grade, often lack cultural competence. Why is it so difficult for districts to teach AI/AK students, or all students, how to read and write in English? Some teachers complain that teaching Native American students is not included in their professional development. Pritchett (2021) surveyed mainstream teachers to assess their knowledge of AI/AN education and the extent to which Native culture is practiced in classrooms and lesson plans. “Results of this study indicated that teachers do not believe that their pre-service training provided adequate preparation to teach Native American students” (Pritchett, 2021, p. 2). The problem that Pritchett (2021) identifies is that by third grade, a child’s reading scores can be an indicator that the student will most likely drop out of high school and will be linked to incarceration. Halcomb (2023) also stated that girls are likely to become single mothers (p. 9).

Pritchett (2021) reflected on reading-score deficits among 4th-grade AI/AN students and noted a “potential weakness in the ability of the education systems” (p. 2). Fourth-grade reading scores for AI/AN students significantly influence their future academic achievement. Inadequate reading skills for all students can result in students dropping out and, in some cases, subsequently end up in correctional facilities. Pritchett’s findings indicated that 85% of students

in their study exhibited “low reading proficiency and low basic reading levels throughout their high school career” (p. 8).

Pritchett (2021) characterized culturally responsive education as an approach in which educators share 'similar linguistic, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds as the majority of their students' (p. 9). Nonetheless, White educators constitute 85% of educational institutions, thereby instructing the predominant population of minority students. Conversely, the majority of students in mainstream American public schools are Black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander (p. 9). According to Pritchett, Indigeneity is manifested within education, research, economics, and health sectors (p. 42). Furthermore, Pritchett emphasized the educators' “responsibility to provide culturally and linguistically responsive education in their classrooms” (p. 9).

Acknowledging and Supporting the Unique Learning Styles of Indigenous Students

Morgan (2009) emphasized the learning styles of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students, an aspect often overlooked by educational districts. The dilemma lies in the general lack of knowledge among Americans, including educators, about AI/AN peoples and their cultures. A scholar or researcher might question whether formal education systems contribute to the misrepresentation of Indigenous histories. Traditionally, Western pedagogies have depicted AI/AN people as historically vanishing. The concept of learning styles is defined as “the way he/she consistently responds cognitively, affectively, and physiologically to a given stimulus” (Morgan, 2009, p. 11). Morgan further noted that AI/AN students tend to learn through a holistic perspective and observational methods, which are effective for trial-and-error learning. These students achieve better learning outcomes when visualization techniques are integrated into classroom instruction. Morgan’s core message underscores the importance of educators acknowledging that AI/AN students have distinct learning styles and adapting their instructional

strategies accordingly. “This will help Native American students to use what is familiar to them to allow them to become successful in participating in a new skill” (p. 1).

Conclusion

Within Indigenized educational frameworks, assessment results, observations, and data demonstrate that Native students tend to learn relational accountability through oral storytelling and listening (Brayboy & Lomawaima, 2018; Porterfield, 2023). According to Brayboy and Lomawaima, “the products of schools—mathematics, science, writing, and reading are rooted in the classics or in so-called logical reasoning” (p. 83). Brayboy and Lomawaima (2018) contended that educational institutions serve as mechanisms through which citizens acquire shared knowledge (p. 83). Indigenous education, in contrast, diverges from the traditional Western classroom model, which is characterized by lectures, discipline, and standardized assessments (p. 84). Indigenous leaders, educators, and elders have actively worked towards the success of Native students; however, Indigenous literacy encompasses more than Western assessment scores. It includes Indigenous ways of living, such as formline literacy of U and Ovoids; ethical literacy manifested in youth-serving elders and community; and land literacy, where autonomy involves practices such as hunting, fishing, and medicinal use. A pedagogical approach that integrates both Western and Indigenous literacy principles can be implemented in classrooms by Native and non-Native educators, utilizing resources such as the OSPI (n.d.) John McCoy (lulilash) Since Time Immemorial (JMLSTI) curriculum.

Chapter 3 introduces Worl’s (2012) at.oow theoretical framework and explains intellectual property belonging to the Tribe, clans, families, and communities. It also describes Tlingit law, clan systems within a matrilineal society, and children’s birthright. Furthermore, Chapter 3 discusses Indigenous Storywork as the primary methodology employed in this study,

involving storytelling through interviews that use structured questions and draw on the narratives of participants, including teachers, parents, and elders. Additionally, the chapter addresses the use of observations to develop culturally competent professional development.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this study, I adopted a mixed-methods approach that integrated both Western and Indigenous methodologies (Botha, 2011; Simonds & Christopher, 2013) to address the following research question: How do public education systems and Indigenous educators and leaders collaborate to implement culturally grounded literacy practices, such as storytelling, to support Indigenous students' English reading and writing development? The research was informed by Absolon (2021), who developed an Indigenous methodology rooted in relational accountability that recognizes Indigenous intelligence through actions connected to the land and ancestors. This was achieved through Storywork (Archibald, 2008), which emphasizes the significance of stories and narrators. Archibald articulated, "The story was told in a way so that the story became a teacher" (p. 138). Furthermore, Quinless (2022) incorporates the "two-eyed seeing" research approach (p. 47), which facilitates the decolonization of research, builds upon Indigenous knowledge systems, bridges Western and Indigenous methodologies, and focuses on generating new paradigms and alternative perspectives on Indigenous identity (Quinless, 2022, p. 47). The two-eyed seeing approach was applied during the observation of Native and non-Native teachers and classroom settings.

Indigenous Storywork Methodology

This study also incorporated oral traditions and relational accountability (Absolon, 2021; Brant et al., 2023; Schnellert et al., 2022). The study included Native and non-Native Head Start teachers, parents, and community members as the primary participants and incorporated the four Rs: Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility (Archibald, 2008; Peterson, 2022; Smith, 2019; Tsosie et al., 2022) to capture participants' stories. When skillfully articulated by a storyteller, narratives can animate ancestral stories, allowing them to acquire a life independent

of their originators. Using these methods, I delineate essential steps in the research process, identify key stakeholders, and describe the curriculum process and its implementation. Storywork Methodology.

Storywork Data

Archibald's (2008) Storywork methodology formed the foundation of this study. The main argument is that Indigenous storytelling offers a distinct, relational learning model for Native students, one that differs from Western literacy approaches. Storytelling transmission is unique to Native students' learning, whereas Western literature represents a lateral mode of thinking. Indigenous literature is transmitted orally, through experiential stories that foster moral accountability for cultural respect, responsibility, and reciprocity toward the listener (p. 3). Indigenous oral transmission is how Native students primarily learn, in contrast to Western academic reading and writing. "One must be ready to share and teach it respectfully and responsibly to others for this knowledge, and its power, to continue" (Archibald, 2008, p. 3). In Archibald's (2008) Storywork research methodology, Archibald (2008) interprets ancestral knowledge from her Stó:lō Tribal nation as embodying wisdom and power. Archibald (2008) coined the term "Storywork" as a legitimate Indigenous method for teaching storytelling. Storytelling carries cultural teachings, values, histories, and relationships, linking knowledge holders and community members who connect Native students to identity and place.

Indigenous Storywork was central to this study, arguing that storytelling, as a teaching practice, drives Western and Indigenous literacy development. By incorporating participants' observations and testimonies, along with relational engagement, the Storywork methodology will capture the essence of each lived experience. Participants' stories were grounded in Archibald's (2008) principles of respect, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (p. 33).

This methodology supports relational accountability, arguing that knowledge flows through relationships between teachers and students, or between researchers and participants, especially regarding land, language, and culture (Archibald, 2008). Indigenous Storywork positions storytelling and cultural pedagogies as foundational for Native students' literacy and academic success, reflected in participants' lived experiences. In the Indigenous Storywork methodology, the argument is that stories and testimonies are valuable forms of data: participants' lived knowledge is legitimate research data. Relational conversations in interviews were grounded in trust and respect, mindful of cultural protocols.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork methodology alongside Worl's (1998) at.oow theoretical framework, which conceptualizes storytelling as both a pedagogical approach and a means of relational accountability. These frameworks emphasize the role of oral stories in transmitting values, histories, and responsibilities, thereby reinforcing cultural continuity and literacy.

Worl's (1998) theoretical framework of at.oow emphasizes the significance of Tlingit epistemology and ontology. This dissertation demonstrates, through the at.oow framework, that stories, songs, dance, and ceremonies are integral to clans and families. The framework portrays totem poles as narratives and as records inscribed on cedar poles. As a scholar of Tlingit heritage, integrating the Tlingit at.oow theoretical framework is vital to Indigenous literacy. Worl's concept of at.oow for the Tlingit people elucidates the dynamics of care, specifically, how, where, and by whom clan possessions, along with cultural stories, songs, and dances, are preserved. Worl underscores that a fundamental aspect of Tlingit law is reverence for property, including button blankets, Chilkat robes, carved masks, totem poles, canoes, and drums or rattles.

used in dance performances. Worl (1998) notes that these artifacts are regarded as sacred and living relatives, requiring diligent stewardship and not being treated as commonplace items. Traditionally, all property is transmitted across generations through ceremonial rites that establish a link with ancestors. Tlingit oral traditions constitute one of the national elements, including origin clan narratives, thereby enriching our research with cultural significance (Alamilla, 2016; Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1987; Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1999; Shorty, 2016; Worl, 1998).

The Tlingit concept of *at.oow* constitutes a fundamental theoretical framework for comprehending ownership, intellectual property, knowledge transmission, and cultural responsibility within Indigenous education. As articulated by Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1999), *at.oow* denotes “owned or purchased things” (p. 15), encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects of cultural inheritance, including supernatural events, names, songs, stories, and the places and objects through which these encounters are commemorated (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1990; Worl, 1998). Worl regards the Tlingit *at.oow* as intellectual property that “will expand on the Tlingit worldview and the spiritual and social dimensions of crests” (p. 21). In accordance with Worl, intellectual property of this nature, such as this dissertation, is regarded as belonging to the Tlingit people.

The *at.oow* also conceptually embodies social responsibility within the Tlingit community. The Tlingit clan crest signifies the belief that animals, plants, and humans are all equal within the spiritual realm: “Humans are part of the spiritual order, and in the appropriate setting and proper state of being, the Tlingit may call on their ancestral spirits” (Worl, 1998, p. 85). Events involving humans and animals attain spiritual significance and are represented by the clan crest, for example, the *táakw.aaneidí* clan crest derives from the Seal People of the

Strongman, as our ancestral figure tore the seal fin in half to demonstrate readiness for hunting. Additionally, we have the woodworm women; however, their origin story remains unknown to the researcher.

Worl (1998) argued that at.oow affirms clan ownership of crests, songs, and stories that symbolize ancestral experiences and relational ties to land and spirit. The visual and performative expressions of at.oow, such as regalia, totem poles, and ceremonial art, serve as living repositories of history and identity. Within this framework, storytelling functions not merely as narrative but as a form of cultural law and literacy, bearing ethical responsibilities for those who share and inherit these teachings. Worl's (1998) analysis of the Chookaneidi clan's Glacier Bay story demonstrates how at.oow legitimizes the interconnection among story, place, and collective memory, thereby reinforcing the sacredness of knowledge and situating research and education within the at.oow framework. Consequently, this approach supports a decolonial perspective on literacy, one that emphasizes Indigenous epistemologies and respects the relational accountability intrinsic to Tlingit worldviews.

As a Tlingit scholar, incorporating the at.oow theoretical framework is vital to Indigenous literacy. Worl's (1998) concept of at.oow for the Tlingit people delineates the dynamics of care, specifically addressing how, where, and by whom clan possessions, along with cultural stories, songs, and dances, are maintained. Worl emphasizes that a fundamental aspect of Tlingit customary law is respect for property, including button blankets, Chilkat robes, carved masks, totem poles, canoes, and drums or rattles used by dance groups. The at.oow conceptually embodies social responsibility within the Tlingit community, as these possessions are regarded as sacred and living relatives, requiring careful stewardship and not to be treated as ordinary items (Worl, 1998).

Research Design

Participants

This study integrated oral traditions and relational accountability within Indigenous communities. Participants comprised both Native and non-Native Nisqually Head Start teachers, parents, and community members. It was essential to include the Nisqually Lushootseed teacher and librarian contracted by our Nisqually Head Start program. The Tlingit and Haida community is convened at the Lynwood, Washington office, where our community events are held, and Tribal artists facilitate cultural workshops on button blankets, drums, and cedar hat weaving.

The documentation in the Appendix includes the flyer (Appendix A), which was created, along with a signed consent form (Appendix B), letters of support from the Tribes (Appendix D), and a copy of the exempt IRB (Appendix E) with contact information, to invite participants (Appendix A). This action was used to gain trust through real accountability.

Qualitative methodologies were used to document Indigenous literature. This methodology included interviews with both Native and non-Native educators regarding their knowledge of serving Native students. The interviews explored whether participants incorporated language, traditional stories, and culture into their curricula and environments, and whether they integrated the John McCoy (lulilaš) and Since Time Immemorial (JMLSTI) curricula (OSPI, n.d.). Participants were observed incorporating Indigenous culture and their pedagogical styles into their teaching practices. Data collection was conducted through the Nisqually Head Start program to gather geographic information in accordance with national Head Start policies and procedures, as well as the policies and procedures established by the Tlingit, Haida, and Nisqually Tribal communities.

Researcher Positionality

As an Indigenous scholar collaborating with Tlingit, Haida, and Nisqually communities, which are relationally interconnected, I brought Indigenous epistemologies into the research process. As the Family Services Coordinator for Early Head Start at Nisqually Head Start, I am responsible for both data collection and interpretation. While such relationships can foster cultural understanding and trust, they may also influence how participants interact, share their stories, and interpret the findings.

I possess over twenty years of experience in youth engagement and education, including service as a board member for various youth initiatives in Seattle and as an Indigenous urban educator. It is an honor to collaborate with fellow Native educators and leaders on projects that influence and honor Native learners. This interest was sparked during my tenure at Daybreak Star as the Family Service Coordinator, where I worked with families through goal-based and needs assessments to help create opportunities in their lives. As a parent, working alongside other parents is a relatable experience, which adds to the fulfillment of this work. Challenges within schools prompted me to enroll my children in Seattle Public Schools' Indian Education program, now known as Title VI. My involvement in the school subsequently led to my election as President of the Parent Committee and to various service roles, in which I collaborated with other parents facing similar challenges in accessing after-school tutoring. My association with the Seattle Native Urban Education community also resulted in my election as the recording secretary. I had the opportunity to work with this organization, providing tutoring services in partnership with Volunteers of Washington. Together, we organized cultural teachings, dinners, and events over five years. Also, I served as the Seattle Delegate for the Tlingit and Haida Central Council Tribal Assembly for a period of 30 years. In this capacity, I was appointed to the

Education Committee and contributed to a resolution affecting Southeast Alaska, Anchorage, Seattle, and California. Additionally, the researcher participated in our local Tlingit and Haida Washington Chapter and was appointed to the Youth Committee, which organized workshops on leadership, vests, headbands, and regalia.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on participants from the Nisqually Head Start program and the Nisqually community. Although this study yielded significant insights, it encompassed several limitations, as delineated in this section. The core of this research was the voices of Tlingit, Haida, and Nisqually educators, families, and community members, conveyed through their narratives. While the understandings of the selected Tribes align with those of Tribes in other Indigenous contexts, the findings are not intended to be generalized to other Tribal Nations, considering their unique languages, stories, cultures, and histories. A limited focus on storytelling and language, confined within a specific time frame, also constrained the study's ability to observe long-term literacy development across academic years. Additionally, classroom observations of instructional practices may not have captured the full range of culturally responsive pedagogies and practices implemented throughout the academic year.

It is also important to note that the Director of the Title VI Indian Education Department and the Superintendent of the North Thurston School District (NTSD) were contacted about participating in this study; however, both declined, claiming privacy issues. This action created challenges for this study: the inability to recruit Educators from the NTSD, which prevented interviews with the teachers and staff who served Native students, and the use of the database to identify students in need of support within their classrooms. Due to privacy protections and district-level restrictions, it was challenging to access information about upper-level students.

This information would have been valuable in developing targeted professional development for educators serving Native students.

Conclusion

Observations and interviews revealed narratives and testimonies about the significance of Indigenous cultural competence, including the importance of incorporating Indigenous stories, music, and language in Native students' identity formation. Chapter 4 will present the findings of this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study was guided by the following research question: How do public education systems and Indigenous educators and leaders collaborate to implement culturally grounded literacy practices, such as storytelling, to support Indigenous students' English reading and writing development? This study was based on Archibald's (2008) Storywork methodology and Worl's (1998) Tlingit at.oow theoretical framework. This chapter presents relational knowledge shared by a Tlingit leader and Nisqually Head Start teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. The Nisqually Head Start program served as the primary site for data collection, which involved classroom observations and interviews with staff, parents, and community members. Data were organized into themes according to participants' responses.

This chapter presents findings on Indigenous literacy, storytelling, and language resurgence, as well as on relational teachings in Indigenous early childhood education within the Nisqually Head Start program. Guided by Archibald's (2008) Storywork methodology and Worl's (1998) Tlingit at.oow theoretical framework, this chapter explores how teachers, parents, and community leaders support Native learners in educational spaces. Findings show that Indigenous literacy extends far beyond Western education in English reading and writing, intertwining storytelling, relational learning, cultural pedagogies, language responsiveness, and land-based education rooted in community engagement. Participants agreed that Indigenous education sovereignty comprises relational learning, identity, healing, survivance, and cultural practices.

Tlingit and Haida Central Council and Washington Chapter

According to the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (n.d.), there are approximately 38,000 Tlingit and Haida (T&H) citizens residing in Southeast Alaska,

Anchorage, California, Washington, and internationally. Of these, 9,000 individuals reside in Washington State. As visitors to the land, we represent the largest tribal population in Washington State. The T&H is a federally recognized tribe. The Tlingit and Haida Central Council is headquartered at 320 West Willoughby Avenue, Suite 300, Juneau, Alaska. The region serves approximately 20 villages and communities. Services include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food assistance, tribal courts, Head Start programs, elders' programs, housing services, clinics, and behavioral health services. The tribe also supports outside communities, including those in Anchorage, California, Oregon, and Washington. According to the Tlingit & Haida Washington Chapter (n.d.), it is a nonprofit organization serving T&H members. The chapter convenes on the first Thursday of each month, excluding December and the summer months. It oversees more than 10 committees, including those focused on governance, education, culture, and society.

Nisqually dxʷsqʷaliʔaš (People Of The River, People Of The Grass)

The Nisqually Indian Tribe's reservation is situated between the towns of Yelm and Lacey, along Highway 510, approximately 15 miles east of Olympia, Washington. Since 2005, the Nisqually Tribe has maintained a population of 5,719 individuals who are served by the Tribe but reside outside the reservation, as well as 650 Nisqually members residing on the 5,000 acres of land situated along the Nisqually River. The Tribe's administrative headquarters is located at 4820 She-Nah-Num Drive SE, Olympia, Washington. Additional departments, including Nisqually Head Start, the Nisqually Library, the Billy Frank Jr. Gym, Maintenance, Human Resources, and the Lushootseed language department, are situated behind the main office.

The Nisqually Tribe's traditional homeland extends along the Nisqually River.¹ It encompasses several significant lands, including the 68-acre Nisqually Highland Ranch, the 347-acre Nisqually Springs, and trust lands comprising 174 acres of forest and floodplain adjacent to the river. The Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge is accessible within a 10-minute drive. The reservation features numerous residences for Nisqually community members, as well as facilities, such as the clinic and the elders' center. The Youth and Community Center, approximately a five-minute drive from Olympia, Washington, hosts various youth programs, including a basketball court, culinary initiatives, and health, fitness, and nutrition programs. Most community events are conducted at this center.

Nisqually Head Start

Nisqually Head Start is a federal early childhood education initiative managed by the Nisqually Indian Tribe. As a federal program, it extends its services beyond the local Nisqually community. While the school maintains a substantial enrollment, the program also caters to other Tribal citizens and non-Native students. Additional services include Lushootseed language instruction, librarian-led read-aloud sessions, and oral storytelling by community leaders, all conducted at least once per week. The institution comprises seven classes; however, I observed three to gain a comprehensive understanding of instruction in both English and Indigenous literature.

A total of 84 children and families are served by Nisqually Head Start, including 60 slots in the Head Start (HS) program for children aged three to five years old, and 24 slots in the Early

¹In 1917, the United States Army at Fort Lewis acquired 3,353 acres of Nisqually land from Pierce County.

Head Start (EHS) program for children aged six weeks to three years old. These programs deliver services to support kindergarten readiness, with a particular emphasis on child development, health, and family support. The facility houses six classrooms: the Head Start classes include Salmon, Huckleberry, Cedar, and Hummingbird, each serving children ages three to five years, while the Eagle and Bear classes accommodate children ages six weeks to three years. Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 classes are designated for children between 12 and 15 months. For this study, I conducted three observations with Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 classes, in addition to a read-aloud session in Teacher 3's classroom.

Nisqually Head Start was selected as the primary research location for this study to observe Indigenous literacy practices, including relational teaching, oral storytelling, language, and culturally responsive practices within classrooms. The objective of these observations was to offer insights into how educators facilitate English and Writing, as well as Indigenous literacy. Findings are presented below.

Theme 1: Relational Teaching

Literacy Through Circle Time

I observed Teacher 1's Classroom during Circle Time on April 23, 2026, from 9:30 to 9:50 am. Teacher 1 was present during the observation. Upon entering the classroom, I noted that Teacher 1 was seated in a teacher's chair, leading circle time with clear, age-appropriate language. The session followed a structured, routine-based approach that actively engaged all students and provided guidance and direction. Students were seated in front of the teacher, with an unobstructed view of the visual learning board, which comprised a calendar, shapes, letters, and colors.

Teacher 1 began by reviewing classroom expectations, emphasizing listening as a form of respect. With a serious tone, Teacher 1 explained that “listening with your ears” demonstrates respect for others. Teacher 1 then shifted to a more cheerful tone, prompting students to place their hands in their laps, reinforcing expectations for participation and self-regulation. The classroom environment supported a sense of belonging and engagement.

The “special letter of the day” was L, represented by the words “listening” and “learning,” reinforcing both literacy and behavioral expectations. Teacher 1 then guided students through calendar work. When asked the month, students confidently responded “April.” When asked the day of the week, students initially responded “Monday.” Teacher 1 used this as a playful teaching moment, pausing before revealing it was Thursday, prompting laughter and engagement. Teacher 1 pointed to the calendar, identified the date as April 23, and guided students in counting the remaining days of the month, concluding that there were 8 days left. When students hesitated to identify the next month, Teacher 1 introduced “May” with a rising vocal tone, encouraging enthusiastic repetition.

Teacher 1 proceeded with phonics instruction, emphasizing letter sounds. For the letter A, students practiced the /aww/ sound through song and identified words such as alligator, April, and classmates’ names. The lesson progressed to the letter B, during which students generated words such as bear, bee, ball, and buzz. Visual aids supported comprehension as students identified images such as an ant and a bed; additionally, one student made a personal connection by describing Teacher S’s bed as “cozy.” Students also identified shapes, accurately naming oval and circle. The lesson then transitioned to language development activities involving opposites, rhyming, and humorous word pairings. Examples included opposites such as hot/cold, light/dark, open/shut, rough/smooth; rhymes such as owl/fowl, sink/pink, rug/bug, pickle/tickle, and

fable/table; and humorous pairs such as Teacher S/bologna and salmon/pop. Students actively participated, demonstrating the ability to recognize patterns, engage in word play, and follow multi-step directions.

In the numeracy segment, Teacher 1 introduced the numbers six and seven using dot representations. The students counted a total of nine dots and recognized that the quantity did not correspond with the numbers presented. Through guided subtraction, removing one dot, followed by two more, the students re-evaluated and discerned when the number matched six. Upon re-adding one dot, the students accurately identified seven. A student requested a slower pace of counting, prompting Teacher 1 to adjust her pace and demonstrate responsiveness to students' needs.

To conclude, Teacher 1 reviewed the key learning points: the date (Thursday, April 23), the letters (A and B), and the shapes (circle and oval). Students then participated in a movement break, stretching and transitioning into a “Thursday free dance” to K-pop music. This activity generated excitement and joy, reinforcing a positive classroom climate. This observation highlights circle time as a foundational literacy practice that integrates oral language development, phonemic awareness, numeracy, and social-emotional learning. The combination of routine, engagement, and culturally responsive interaction supports kindergarten readiness through both academic and relational teaching practices.

The observation findings centered on relational accountability for teachers and students' learning environments in Nisqually Head Start classrooms. The example demonstrated relational accountability through greeting, collaboration, student participation, and shared responsibility. For example, Teacher 1 was able to turn behavior into reciprocity and respect for the teacher and

the student. Students were actively engaging in interactive literacy through song and movement, with a focus on relational learning to support literacy development.

Theme 2: Ethical Learning

Respect for Property and for Each Other

I observed Teacher 2's classroom on April 21, 2026, from 9:15 to 9:45 am, during circle time. As soon as I walked through the door, Teacher 2 greeted the classroom with haʔl dadatu, which means "good morning" in Lushootseed. Teacher 2 then gathered all the students for circle time and was sad because the material on the board was out of place. He explained that, while the students like to pretend to be teachers, they need to respect the learning area. Teacher 2 turned this into a learning opportunity for respect, relational, responsibility, reciprocity, and interrelatedness.

Subsequently, Teacher 2 and the students collaboratively sang "Good morning, good morning, good morning, who is sitting next to you?" They stated the names of the friends seated next to them and initiated the song once more. The students actively participated, fostering a heightened awareness of their environment, including their peers' presence, seating arrangements, and a broader sense of identity in the world.

Teacher 2 then inquired of the students regarding the designated letter of the week, to which they responded, "The letter S." The teacher arranged the students in a line and instructed them to move around the room with their arms extended, mimicking a snake, while vocalizing the "S" sound. During this activity, he referenced "Sammy the snake" and "Slytherin from Harry Potter. Following the activity, he commended the students, saying, "Excellent work." Said Teacher 2. The instructor demonstrated relational teaching methods focused on letter sounds and

recognition, thereby fostering relational learning among the students through connection-making, active participation, engagement in the activity, and attentive listening.

Then, Teacher 2 conducted an activity on Do's and Don'ts, organized into two columns and accompanied by illustrative pictures. Because the students were not yet fully settled from the preceding S activity, Teacher 2 had to remind them to listen attentively. He produced a mechanical sound, motioned towards the ears, and stated, "Put on your binocular ears to listen." In response, all students mimicked the mechanical sound by cupping their hands over their ears, thereby calming themselves to facilitate active learning. Teacher 2 used a pointer wand to call on students and presented scenarios corresponding to the pictures, which students were required to identify. Additionally, he involved a student in creating a scenario that matched one of the images. The Do's and Don'ts activity serves as an exercise in ethical literacy, guiding 3- and 4-year-olds on self-regulation in specific situations, such as when choosing to pick their nose; in such cases, the student would be advised to "Wash your hands." During these lessons, students engage in discussions, utilize language skills, and collaborate effectively with their peers.

Theme 3: Indigenous Language

Indigenous Languages and Cultural Identity

Next, Teacher 2 had the students grab a drum and a stick from the music area. He demonstrated quiet drums with the drum in the air, and then he played the beats to the Nisqually Lushootseed song *huý labcəbut*, which means "until we meet again" and "take care of yourself." Teacher 2 employed the Nisqually language to strengthen cultural identity, foster voice, and facilitate relational practice. The students engaged attentively, participated in the language, collaborated with peers, and established cultural connections.

The findings of this observation reflect Archibald's (2008) Storywork methodology by promoting ethical literacy. The observation also found evidence of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, and intergenerational knowledge as reflected in the use of Lushootseed and English vocabulary. Applying Worl's (1998) at.oow theoretical framework, cultural knowledge was conveyed and shared in accordance with established protocols, with connections to cultural identity rooted in Nisqually cultural practices.'

These findings demonstrate that the Lushootseed language that Teacher 2 integrated into the classroom strengthened cultural identity. Teacher 2 did this by using Lushootseed greetings, songs, and drumming practices provided by the Tribe to incorporate Indigenous teachings. This finding shows that Indigenous language can be supported through cultural continuity and relational learning, as reflected in Archibald's (2008) Storywork principles and Worl's (1998) at.oow framework.

Theme 4: Storywork

Literacy Through Storywork

On April 21, 2026, I observed Teacher 3's classroom as they read *Teaching of the Drum* (*Nuu Chah Nulth*) written by Ren Louie and illustrated by Karlene Harvey. Teacher 3 read the book. The book discusses the drum material and asks what it is made of. There were eight students in this classroom.

On a typical day, Teacher 3 conducts story time for the class during their lunch break. The students are generally seated and attentive. However, on this particular day, the students were simultaneously reading books and matching paper-cutout animals to their corresponding books on the table. Additionally, students were playing while Teacher 3 was reading the book aloud. Teacher 3 stated that continuing reading aloud regardless of whether the students

remained seated or wandered around the room and believed they were still listening. Teacher 3 utilized expressive gestures to maintain the students' attention.

Teacher 3 exhibited a welcoming and composed demeanor when reading aloud. They encouraged predictions and paused to address questions. The book concerned a Nisqually youth whose mother gave a handmade drum. Teacher 3 ensured that the book was relevant to the Tribes' culture, which is linked to identity. The students remained engaged, alternating between listening to the story and exploring the classroom.

Teacher 3 promoted literacy development by focusing on listening comprehension, vocabulary development, and early reading. What I observed during this class aligned with Indigenous Storywork principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence. This classroom was also aligned with the at.oow concepts of cultural responsiveness, cultural context, owning story, connection to land and community, and story acknowledgment. Pictures depicted cultural identity and cultural connection to Nisqually.

Theme 5: at.oow

Cultural Identity and Belonging

During this observation, I observed Teacher 3's connection with the students. Teacher 3 shared, "Even if the students are not sitting, they are listening to the story." The book was connected to the Nisqually tradition and culture through its focus on caring for a drum. I was surprised at how much Teacher 3's cultural knowledge added to the book. For example, Teacher 3 shared, "If you face the drum upside down on a surface, the voice is being silenced." Relational learning was demonstrated through Teacher 3's use of the book to convey cultural knowledge about the Drum, including how it is made and how to care for it.

These findings indicated that Tribal Head Start's literacy development practices in the classroom extend beyond English reading and writing instruction and are intertwined with Indigenous Storywork practices. In the classroom, it was evident that Storytelling, Lushootseed language, movement, drumming, and singing the Nisqually song created a relational learning space that is an important component of literacy practices and participation that support cultural identity.

Overview of Nisqually Head Start Observations

Across all classroom observations, it was evident that Nisqually Head Start inherently practices Indigenous literacy that is relational, culturally rooted, and academically integrated. Indigenous literacy development was evidenced through movement, storytelling, Lushootseed language, drumming, peer interactions, and cultural teaching practices that bolster both academic achievement and Indigenous identity. These findings underscore the significance of early childhood Indigenous education in preserving Nisqually cultural pedagogy and advancing Nisqually educational sovereignty, especially through relational learning environments.

Participant Interviews

In addition to classroom observations, I conducted interviews with Nisqually Head Start teachers, parents, and community members. The findings from these interviews are based on Archibald's (2008) Storywork methodology and Worl's (1998) theoretical framework, both of which emphasize relational accountability, storytelling, cultural responsibility, and Indigenous ways of knowing. The participants signed a consent form (see Appendix B) to use their names; however, participants' titles are used instead of names to safeguard their privacy. Seven individuals contributed insights regarding Indigenous literacy, cultural identity, language, family engagement, and Nisqually educational sovereignty. | participants are identified as Spruce,

Butterfly, Sage, Copper, Sweetgrass, Flower, and Cedar Rose. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts are provided in Appendix C.

Relational Teaching and Community Connection

Participants characterized Western education as a direct learning methodology, whereas Indigenous education was described as a relational learning methodology. A pronounced sense of community existed among teachers, parents, students, and community leaders, grounded in Indigenous educational practices at Tribal Head Start.

Spruce shared that “The most crucial relationships within the classroom are those with the families as a collective group served in this community.” Spruce elaborated on the importance of teachers comprehending students' family systems and honoring their cultural backgrounds, as this cultivates a sense of belonging within the classroom. Spruce highlighted that aligning home and school relationships enhances learning success for both Native and non-Native students. They also indicated, “When everything at home and everything inside the classroom are matching up, that is where the magic happens with the kids.”

Copper expressed a similar sentiment regarding the support of families who assist their children: “I believe that my role in supporting children involves supporting their parents.” Likewise, Sage emphasized the significance of “building relationships with families and getting to know them, and vice versa.” Flower highlighted that community relationships constitute an extended family network beyond the immediate biological family, encompassing aunties, uncles, teachers, elders, and other community members. My child “...is observing, and she is learning from everyone.” These observations suggest that Indigenous educational philosophies are intimately linked to relational accountability within the community. This perspective stands in contrast to Western educational paradigms, which tend to emphasize individualism.

Indigenous Literacy Beyond English Reading and Writing

Participants were determined to demonstrate that literacy extends beyond Western education, including English reading and writing, and that Indigenous literacy is rooted in storytelling, communication, observation, and cultural pedagogies grounded in oral traditions and relational learning. Copper stated that “Literacy can be whatever we want it to be as long as we are passing down stories and sharing stories.” Cedar Rose emphasized that literacy is connected to revitalization, oral history, and cultural survivance. Cedar Rose recalled how the community urgently recorded songs, stories, and language to preserve Indigenous knowledge: “They did a lot of language recording, stories, songs, historical.” Flower described literacy within the community context, including cooking, harvesting, hunting, fishing, reading books together, powwow dancing, and storytelling: “Teachings are just all around us.” Similarly, Butterfly highlighted that literacy instruction includes storytelling, reading books, writing, using flashcards, and engaging in relational communication with students. “By talking with the children, telling them stories, flashcards, books, writing, all those kinds of things.” All Participants also acknowledged that Indigenous literacy encompasses experiential learning, oral storytelling, land-based education, and the transmission of ancestral knowledge.

Language and Cultural Identity

The Lushootseed language served as the central theme throughout the interviews. Many participants agreed that Lushootseed and other Indigenous languages contributed significantly to healing, identity construction, and fostering a sense of belonging. Sweetgrass remarked, “It really helps with cultural identity. It strengthens their cultural identity and their resilience.” Sweetgrass expressed satisfaction that children are eager to engage with her and to comprehend the complexities of Lushootseed phonetics in language acquisition: “They get so excited ... They

identify me with the language.” Sweetgrass also emphasized the importance of learning Lushootseed due to the dwindling number of native speakers: “Revitalizing it and preserving it is crucial so that it can keep going for the next generation.” Cedar Rose participant underscored that language is medicine: “Language is the way that we connect to the ancestors.” Flower shared her emotional experiences, observing that her youngest daughter, who learned new Lushootseed words in her Tribal Head Start class, will teach the family. Flower shared, “It almost made me tear up when she speaks Lushootseed; it is so powerful and beautiful.”

Participants also discussed challenges associated with language revitalization efforts, including issues of lateral violence within the community among language keepers and questions regarding who has the authority to teach and learn the language. These issues originate from colonization and assimilation. Cedar Rose remarked, “Those intergenerational traumas are still kind of preventing us from being whole with our languages.” Despite these challenges, participants emphasized that learning Indigenous languages provides healing, survivance, and resilience.

Storytelling as Teaching and Knowledge Transmission

Traditional oral history and stories serve as the foundational Indigenous pedagogies for teaching and learning. Participants concurred that stories transmit teachings, morals, identity, land-based knowledge, and ancestral wisdom. As Cedar Rose shared, “Stories are meant to help you form who you are as a person.” These narratives facilitate children's understanding of land and relational learning with animals, land, and spirit. Cedar Rose shared, “I think that really speaks to them spiritually.”

Flower indicated that numerous Indigenous communities share storytelling traditions of mutual origin; these stories help Native students establish a connection with the land and their

identity. Flower shared, “Stories help children understand who they are.” Spruce held the view that oral storytelling, when employed effectively in the classroom, promotes students' emotional development, literacy skills, and relational learning. According to Spruce, students maintain a profound connection to oral stories. Spruce shared that “Kids get so much from bookless stories.”

The Lushootseed language is considered a medium for cultural teachings through sacred oral stories, including those concerning animals. As Sweetgrass shared, “Owls bring messages... those are the type of teachings that I bring to the kids.” These insights were significant as they illustrated how Indigenous literacy utilizes storytelling as a form of Indigenous pedagogy and cultural transmission within Indigenous education systems.

Participants also discussed the distinction between Western educational frameworks and Indigenous educational principles. They advocated for Indigenous educational sovereignty to be fundamentally embedded within Indigenous curricula, such as the Since Time Immortal curriculum. Cedar Rose envisioned a future where Indigenous education sovereignty is realized. Cedar Rose shared, “I would love for us to operate a K–12 school along with a college or university on the reservation.” Additionally, Cedar Rose clarified, “Educational sovereignty entails defining what success means for us.”

Spruce emphasized the importance of balancing the standard curriculum with Indigenous education, stating, “Customization is a must when you are working for an Indigenous tribe.” Copper concurred, highlighting the necessity for flexibility to integrate federally mandated curriculum with the cultural curricula of the Tribes: “Children learned before schools existed.” Participants agreed that Indigenous educators and Tribal community members should be actively

involved in the development of curricula for instruction in the Since Time Immoral curriculum and Lushootseed language.

Healing that Leads to Resilience

In most of the interviews, participants highlighted the significance of addressing intergenerational trauma and survivance. Cedar Rose emphasized that historical violence against Indigenous peoples, driven by assimilation efforts, resulted in cultural attrition. “People had to try to be something else.” Furthermore, Cedar Rose characterized lateral violence as a fundamental issue within communities connected to assimilation processes. “Those colonialist behaviors like individualism and competition... it is extremely harmful.”

Participants shared that the process of healing is rooted in language, culture, and storytelling, all of which are intertwined with community support. Sweetgrass highlighted the significance of imparting respect, kindness, and patience through Lushootseed language instruction. Sage emphasized that it is fundamentally about helping families discover their inner strength and resilience: “Just encourage them to share that information and keep it going.” Flower stated that parenting is grounded in empathy, relational responsibility, and cultural teachings connected to the land or community. These insights were embedded within Indigenous Literacy and Tribal education sovereignty, which extend beyond academic practices to serve as methods for healing, identity preservation, survivance, and wellness.

Clan Identity, Story, and at.oow as Living Literacy

In addition to the participants named above, I conducted an interview with a Tlingit Haida Tribal Leader named Yéil (Tlingit word for Raven), a distinguished community leader from the Tlingit and Haida nations. Yéil’s family originates from the Raven House in Angoon, Alaska, and he belongs to the Raven Moiety. Yéil’s clan is the Deisheetaan, which translates to

"Raven house." Yéil is an accomplished master carver and artist; the workshop displays numerous artifacts curated by the spouse, including Native-inspired designs produced for workshops, such as carved paddles, miniature totems, and T-shirts. A T&H Tribal leader, Yéil has been carving a totem pole in the center of the workshop. Yéil is also renowned for his expertise in formline silver jewelry.

Yéil provided a comprehensive description of Tlingit identity, sharing the moiety, clan house, and Kwan (territory). When asked about the manner of self-introduction, Yéil stated, "We do not do that; it is like boasting." However, the Káani, which signifies brother-in-law and serves as the direct opposite of the people who sit across from you, could introduce them. Yéil characterized Tlingit identity as being intrinsically linked to clan, house, names, songs, stories, regalia, and artwork, and constitutes a sacred possession that embodies familial connections. These teachings encompass ethical literacy, including the skills of listening, appropriate speech, and understanding clan relationships to identify whom to approach for answers. As Yéil shared,

Back in the old days, you could tell a person's history by their name. Once you know their name, it usually connects to their clan house. If you know the clan house, you know its history, territory, families, and connections.

Storytelling as Teaching, Knowledge, and Transmission

Yéil, the T&H Tribal leader, elaborated on the methodology employed by elders and uncles, emphasizing the use of Storywork as a means of instruction through narrative rather than direct explanation. Yéil explained that stories significantly influenced learners' understanding of protocols, relationships, and responsibilities. "When someone inquired about the functioning of a specific process, the uncles would often respond, 'That reminds me of a story.' Through such stories, comprehension was markedly enhanced." This response exemplified how traditional

storytelling serves as a natural conduit for transmitting Indigenous educational practices. Rather than employing a lateral approach to knowledge dissemination, stories serve to connect learners to memory, history, values, and responsibilities.

at.oow as Sacred Knowledge, History, and Responsibility

Yéil shared that at.oow signified “precious belonging,” a term that encapsulates our ancestral knowledge, clan history, and relational responsibility. Yéil elaborated in rich detail how our regalia, hats, robes, songs, and artwork are not merely objects; they embody stories, histories, and responsibilities. “It is not just an item. It is something that carries the power of our ancestors. It bears our history.” Yéil’s stories align with Worl’s (1998) theoretical framework of at.oow, which asserts that Indigenous literacy is founded upon inheritance, responsibility, relational accountability, and ancestral knowledge. Items such as regalia, songs, stories, and ceremonial objects hold historical and cultural significance as described by Worl’s (1998) theoretical framework; these artifacts are active carriers of knowledge and identity.

Learning through Exclusion, Persistence, and Responsibility to Teach

Due to Yéil’s dual identity, straddling both Native and non-Native environments, Yéil encountered exclusion. The commitment to developing artistic skills led them to use library resources, trace designs, and practice. Subsequently, he received guidance from the clan uncles, who were willing to share their knowledge. “I wanted to learn so badly that I had to fight to learn.” In this context, Indigenous literacy can be hindered by colonialism and racism. Yéil’s narrative is anchored in resilience, survivance, unwavering determination to learn, and the capacity to educate others.

Responsive Teaching in Schools

Yéil also reflected on their schooling experience, particularly concerning issues of racism, erasure, and low expectations. Yéil's educational background significantly differed from that of his son. Yéil's son's schools are more accepting of Native culture; however, Yéil has expressed concerns to the district regarding bullying and the district's responsiveness when children require support. Yéil believes that educators should recognize when students are falling behind and provide appropriate assistance. "When a student needs help, recognize that they need help. Do not assume they cannot learn." Yéil's response to my research questions concerning how public schools support Indigenous students indicated that progress has been made in schools since his own attendance; nonetheless, improvements are necessary in areas such as accountability, anti-bullying initiatives, and culturally responsive teaching.

Educators, Elders, Clan Leaders, and Future Generations

Yéil pointed out the importance of community leaders, including elders, clan leaders, aunties, and uncles, who teach younger people who they are and where they come from. He explained the importance of cultural identity and belonging. "When you know who you are and where you come from, it changes how you view life." Cultural leadership is Yéil's vision for future generations. This includes teaching the younger generation the clan structures, songs, stories, language, and traditions.

Yéil's interview supported the finding that Indigenous education should be grounded in relational learning, culture, and ancestral knowledge systems. Yéil was worried that some contemporary institutions might disrupt traditional clan distinctions, cultural protocols, and clan leadership roles. He was also concerned that our 10,000-year-old transmission of culture and

traditions will become extinct, which is why we need to protect clan knowledge and be culturally accountable.

Yéil's interview also illustrated that Tlingit literacy encompasses our at.oow, clan houses, stories, songs, artwork, and relational protocols. Yéil's insights served as a reminder that literacy extends beyond reading and writing in English to encompass listening, interpretation, and responsibility for Indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, he emphasized that storytelling is fundamentally rooted in our teaching methods; for instance, elders and relatives utilize stories to elucidate lessons, protocols, and relationships. Yéil also observed that instances of racism and exclusion have decreased in schools since their old time as a student. Most critically, Yéil emphasized the importance of the next generation preserving our 10,000-year-old traditions, clan identities, and Indigenous knowledge systems.

Recentering Indigenous Literacy through Clan, Story, and at.oow

Yéil described at.oow as "precious objects that our ancestors carried..." He also described "... how we have them stored" through historical artifacts that portray stories and elucidate history, family, and clan. at.oow is a literacy framework rooted in clan identity and narratives. Indigenous literacy encompasses the ability to interpret and responsibly transmit knowledge, which aligns with Indigenous theoretical frameworks that, within Indigenous understandings, are relational to the Tlingit and Haida communities and ancestors. Davidson and Davidson (2018) characterized this as ethical literacy concerning who or how one may speak in storytelling or historical narratives, and how the speaker shares knowledge with the community.

Yéil shared that, as a person of mixed heritage encompassing both white and Tlingit backgrounds, he frequently felt inadequately supported by both communities. He was not fully embraced by either the white or the Tlingit society. Consequently, he encountered lateral

violence related to identity. The examples provided by Yéil pertain to earlier years; for instance, the clan uncles elected not to share the Tlingit Clan traditions with Yéil, and the Deisheetaan People from Angoon also declined to impart traditional clan knowledge. Yéil independently learned Tlingit artwork in later years. The Káani intervened once they recognized the artistic expertise, and they also instructed them in clan etiquette. Moreover, Yéil is currently recognized as a master artist.

Storywork as Pedagogy: Learning Through Narrative and Relationship

Yéil characterized storytelling as an “integral mode” (Archibald, 1997, p. 14) of instruction that aligns seamlessly with the principles of Storywork as outlined by Archibald (1997). Stories serve as pedagogical tools to impart protocols, historical narratives, and cultural ways of being. Yéil’s elucidation of students’ inquiry processes and the elders’ storytelling pedagogy exemplified narratives with multiple layers of meaning. This methodology fosters active listening, reflective thought, and relational understanding among both educators and learners. It stands in contrast to Western pedagogical approaches, which tend to be rigid and explicit in their directives. Conversely, storytelling emphasizes a profound connection to ancestral knowledge.

Conclusion

These findings demonstrate that Indigenous literacy is rooted in community-centered practices, encompassing relational learning, land-based curricula, and cultural competence. All participants agreed that education should extend beyond English reading and writing by incorporating Indigenous literacy elements, such as storytelling, language, and cultural pedagogies, to foster both academic achievement and cultural identity within the framework of the Western education system.

Relational engagement with teachers, administrators, students, and families is vital for allowing collaboration in integrating Western and Indigenous curricula within educational settings. Incorporating standardized academic content alongside Indigenous-centered curricula is essential for Indigenous early childhood education. Participants agreed that Western education must align with Indigenous educational systems that emphasize educational sovereignty and cultural competence. These findings recognize the efforts of Tribal Head Start relational learning, language preservation, storytelling, and community involvement.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter delineates the findings from Chapter 4 in relation to the research questions, Archibald's (2008) Storywork, Worl's (1998) Tlingit at.oow theoretical frameworks, and extant literature. Additionally, it addresses the study's limitations and provides recommendations for future research. The primary research question guiding this study was: How do public education systems and Indigenous educators and leaders collaborate to implement culturally grounded literacy practices, such as storytelling, to support Indigenous students' development in English reading and writing? This study examined how Indigenous literacy is practiced in Head Start classrooms and other educational settings within Head Start and Indigenous communities. Findings will be discussed through the lenses of relational accountability, cultural competency, and Indigenous knowledge systems.

Nisqually dx"sq"ali2aš (People Of The River, People Of The Grass)

The Nisqually Indians have inhabited the south Puget Sound watershed since time immemorial, prior to the 1833 Medicine Creek Treaty. The Nisqually people migrated from the northern Great Basin and traversed the Cascade Mountains. As a community primarily engaged in fishing, they chose the Mashel River as their settlement and source of sustenance due to its environment, establishing it as their homeland. Squalli-absch, the ancestors of the contemporary Nisqually Indian Tribe, are historically a fishing people; salmon constitutes the primary food source and forms the cultural foundation of their society. The Nisqually Tribe serves as the steward of its fisheries and operates two hatcheries located on Clear Creek and Kalama Creek. Their rich cultural heritage emphasizes kinship values, which are cherished by both their people and visitors residing on or near the reservations.

Tlingit and Haida Central Council and Washington Chapter

Tlingit and Haida are federally recognized tribes representing the Tlingit and Haida peoples across Southeast Alaska and urban areas beyond the designated service region. Although the tribes' headquarters are situated in Juneau, Alaska, approximately one-third of their members reside outside of Alaska. The Washington Chapter serves as an extension of the Central Council, supporting Tlingit and Haida tribal citizens through cultural programs, community gatherings, political engagement, and educational workshops that disseminate cultural knowledge. This chapter plays a vital role in offering opportunities such as the Biennial Culture Fair, which facilitates connections to clans, identity, language, and traditional practices. During the event, participants craft artifacts like woven headbands on the first day. On the second day, multiple dance groups perform clan songs while adorned in regalia representing their clans, despite the geographical distance from our ancestral land, referred to as Kwan. Cultural identity remains deeply rooted in clan structures, the moieties of Raven and Eagle (Wolf), and ancestral territories. Kinship systems are organized around social relationships, governance, traditional knowledge, and ceremonial practices.

By integrating the context of the Tlingit and Haida Washington Chapter (THWA), the significance of Indigenous literacy instruction for our villages outside our Central Council's jurisdiction became more evident. The conveyance of our clan's history and cultural heritage via storytelling persists at cultural gatherings organized by THWA board members. This tradition remains reflected in our family practices within the village, and the culture is transmitted through our matrilineal traditions.

Relational Teaching Supports Indigenous Literacy Development

One significant finding from the classroom observations was the use of relational pedagogies that facilitate Indigenous literacy development among Native learners. Educators demonstrated the importance of relationships, fostering a sense of belonging, peer interaction, and shared responsibility within the classroom environment. The teachers' approach encompassed academic instruction and literacy, alongside relational engagement and storytelling that integrated songs, dance movement, and humor. For example, Teacher 2's classroom adapted a classroom disruption caused by the destruction of learning materials into a relational learning opportunity, focusing on responsibility, reciprocity, and respect for shared space. The findings of this scenario reflected Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork principles of respect, responsibility, and reverence. This demonstrates that ethical literacy instruction can be conveyed through relational interactions rather than harsh disciplinary practices.

Similarly, with humor as a facet of ethical literacy, observation of Teacher 1's classroom incorporated a playful dialogue combined with movement into phonemic awareness and oral language activities. These interactions facilitated the development of students' social and emotional safety through active participation in literacy practices. These findings demonstrate that Indigenous literacy learning is exemplified by student participants who experience relational accountability, a sense of belonging, and emotional connection as evidenced in the classroom environment.

Elders, Clan Systems, and Indigenous Knowledge

A significant finding across the data is the role of Indigenous community leaders, such as elders, aunties, uncles, and clan leaders, in teaching and practicing Indigenous literacy pedagogies. Daily interactions with community leaders are vital to traditional learning.

Community leaders guide through lived experience and cultural knowledge. Nevertheless, participants expressed concern that leadership roles within the community are being supplanted by institutionalized, standardized programs rather than rooted in the relational foundations of Indigenous knowledge. This transition poses a risk of Native learners losing sight of the importance of these relational foundations in preserving our 10,000-year-old traditions. It is imperative to uphold continuity in supporting the success of our Native students by anchoring them in the systems of elders and clans within Indigenous education. Preserving traditions is essential for sustaining cultural identity.

Cultural and Educational Environment

Northwest Indian College, the Lushootseed language, Youth programs, and Head Start support cultural and educational environments. Indigenous literacy is evident through Lushootseed language instruction, storytelling, Song and dance, drumming, the OSPI (n.d.) John McCoy (lulilaš) Since Time Immemorial curriculum, and strong family and elder involvement. This aligns well with Archibald's (2008) Storywork methodology, Worl's (1998) Tlingit at.oow theoretical framework, Davidson & Davidson's (2018) framework, and Brayboy's (2005) Tribal Critical Theory (Tribal Crit). These frameworks extend beyond English reading and writing instruction by practicing educational sovereignty through Lushootseed language, oral storytelling, songs, movement, and land-based pedagogies.

Implications for Indigenous Literacy and Future Generations

Participants' visions for the future were consistent with extensive research on cultural identity (Brown, 1991; Grande, 2015; Jones & Singh, 2013; Shirley, 2017; Smith, 2019). Grande (2015) emphasized that such visions can serve as a safeguard against the challenges faced by Native peoples, including disengagement, substance abuse, and mental health issues. For

Indigenous literacy to flourish within the educational system, it must be relational, incorporate cultural learning, use storytelling as a pedagogical method, uphold at.oow and Indigenous protocols, foster collaboration with Tribal communities, and bolster academic achievement through the development of identity.

Healing, Trauma, and Survivance

Trauma and Healing. Intergenerational trauma and healing were important themes in this research. Participants agreed that colonization, assimilation, and racism are at the root of language loss, lateral violence, and cultural disconnection among Indigenous communities. At the same time, participants agreed that Indigenous communities need to practice survivance with resilience and healing. When healing occurs, the community enhances language learning, storytelling, cultural teachings, and community relationships, which will help build Native students' academic success.

Cedar Rose emphasized that, to foster community relationships, it is essential to implement a healing process aimed at reconstructing Indigenous language and cultural identity. Sweetgrass exemplified this approach by imparting knowledge to students with respect, kindness, and emotional awareness through Lushootseed pedagogical methods. Furthermore, Flower highlighted that parenting practices are deeply rooted in empathy, gratitude, and a strong connection to the land and natural environment. These insights were consistent with the perspectives of Indigenous scholars, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2019), who assert that Indigenous research and education aim to replace colonial harm with healing and restoration. Indigenous “Peoples are also reclaiming, recovering, and revitalizing their story-based traditions for individual, family, and community healing, educational, justice, and research purposes. Self-determination aligns with Indigenous values within Western educational frameworks” (p, 14)

Indigenous Language. Indigenous language as a means of healing was also a significant theme in this study. Participants agreed that Lushootseed, or Indigenous language acquisition, is intrinsically linked to cultural identity and contributes to healing processes. Sweetgrass remarked that speaking their Indigenous language fortifies Native students' cultural identity and resilience. Likewise, Cedar Rose characterized language as "medicine." These findings are associated with Indigenous literacy, which encompasses oral traditions of speaking Indigenous languages that foster community wellness and identity development.

Participants pointed out that colonization, in the form of boarding schools, enforced assimilation policies and served as the root cause of Indigenous language loss. Cedar Rose added that generations before were discouraged from speaking Indigenous languages and observing cultural traditions because they feared racism and threats to their survival. Most participants concurred that revitalizing language is essential to ensuring survivance, as articulated by Vizenor (2008).

Instead of focusing on the harm wrought by past injustices, the community can commence healing through cultural resurgence by implementing Lushootseed instruction within educational institutions and households, as well as establishing mechanisms for fluent communication. Flower observed her daughter bringing Lushootseed words home, thereby reversing colonial educational paradigms. In contrast to assimilationist educational policies that eradicated Indigenous languages, the language departments on reservations are actively restoring linguistic and cultural identities.

Public Education: Progress and Ongoing Challenges

Findings suggest that public education systems have advanced in acknowledging Indigenous cultures; however, significant gaps persist, including insufficient academic support

for Native students, inadequate responses to bullying, and the integration of Indigenous pedagogies. Consequently, educational institutions must adopt transformative practices that align with Indigenous knowledge systems, promote relational teaching, and engage communities beyond formal school hours.

This study also suggests that Indigenous literacy is not a secondary factor in education but is the foundational system of knowledge. For Tlingit and Haida, literacy is based on relationships among participants; intergenerational stories are the responsibilities that extend across generations and geographies. Indigenous communities should not rely solely on public education systems, though these systems have made progress over time and across regions. Indigenous educators and leaders are responsible for sustaining Indigenous literacy. Ongoing work with community leaders ensures that knowledge is preserved, lived experience is shared, and practices are upheld to move forward.

Indigenous Language and Cultural Practices Strengthen Identity

Cultural competency, encompassing Lushootseed language, storytelling, singing, and drumming, was important across all findings. This was particularly evident in the classes of Teacher 1 and Teacher 3, where cultural teachings were incorporated into daily instruction rather than being segregated as an unrelated subject. For instance, Teacher 2 used Lushootseed, employing greetings and songs during circle time. Teacher 3 read aloud from "Teaching of the Drum" (Nuu-chah-nulth), which featured Indigenous literacy concerning the drum, identity, and community relationships. Students were enthusiastic about these activities and unaware that they were engaging in Nisqually culture, which is fundamentally rooted in music, storytelling, and language.

These findings align with Worl's (1998) Tlingit theoretical framework, emphasizing the importance of cultural ownership, identity, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. The observational findings are rooted in Indigenous literacy practices that facilitate student engagement and identity development. Furthermore, these findings encompass not only English reading and writing but also oral storytelling, singing and drumming, protocols, and Lushootseed language.

Oral Language Development Occurs Through Interactive and Communal Learning

Findings from the classroom observations are pertinent to oral language development, as evidenced by collaborative, interactive, and community-based learning environments. Students engaged in repetitive songs, storytelling, and rhyming activities, supplemented by peer interactions and teacher-led discussions. For instance, Teacher 1's students practiced identifying opposites and rhymes by working with rhyming words, participating in playful activities in a stimulating environment that fosters language, communication, and vocabulary development. Through Teacher 2's classroom songs and relational responses, listening skills and oral participation were enhanced. Teacher 3 demonstrated that students could listen to read-aloud books while engaging in movement and playing around the classroom. These observations illustrate that oral language acquisition in classroom settings occurs relationally rather than solely through direct instructor instruction.

Indigenous Literacy in Tribal Head Start

Classroom observations indicated that Indigenous literacy instruction was conducted in an intuitive, natural manner. Academic education bolsters the social and emotional growth of both Native and non-Native students. It enhances cultural identity, ethical conduct, participation in cultural songs and drumming, and engagement within the community. For instance, circle time

functioned as a platform for literacy development, numeracy, social and emotional behavior expectations, peer interactions, and the exploration of Nisqually culture, aligning with Indigenous pedagogical principles. Educators exemplify respect, attentive listening, active participation, and accountability as integral components of their lesson plans. These observations exemplify Archibald's (2008) Storywork methodology, which emphasizes an integrated approach embracing education of the heart, mind, body, and spirit. These findings support integrating Indigenous literacy within academic curricula, thereby supporting Native students' cultural identity and relational understanding.

Indigenous Literacy as Relational Learning

A prominent discovery within this research was the consensus among participants that Indigenous literacy is fundamentally rooted in culture and relational learning, rather than solely within Western educational frameworks. Participants concurred that Indigenous literacy encompasses storytelling, listening, and observation, all of which are intrinsically linked to cultural engagement. These findings align with the principles articulated in Archibald's (2008) Storywork, which emphasizes learning through story, relationships, respect, reciprocity, responsibility, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. For instance, Flower connected land-based literacy learning with hunting, fishing, cedar gathering, storytelling, reading collaboratively, and community involvement. Indigenous literacy involves everyday living through relational learning, as opposed to the compartmentalization of Western academic skills. Likewise, Spruce felt that literacy instruction integrates both Western and Indigenous elements; educational environments should reflect these dual influences. This includes the use of books, multiple languages, storytelling, and culturally shared experiences, which should be universally incorporated across all classroom settings. These findings indicate that both Native and non-

Native learners are represented through experiential and relational learning within educational contexts.

Storytelling as Indigenous Pedagogy

Storytelling was the primary teaching method discussed in most of the interviews. Participants agreed that stories are sacred and that their cultural values in teaching enhance identity, spiritual growth, and moral guidance. Cedar Rose shared that stories “help form who you are as a person,” noting that they are not merely for entertainment but are connected to identity and survival. These findings align with Archibald’s (2008) Storywork methodology, which holds that stories are the true forms of knowledge transmission. Participants agreed that storytelling is connected to land, animals, ancestors, and community. Flower pointed out that origin stories from her Tribes’ pedagogy are connected to her culture and camas harvesting. In contrast, Sweetgrass connected Owl stories to their cultural meanings. These findings support Indigenous scholars who argue that storytelling is central to Native students’ learning within Indigenous epistemologies of land-based and ethical literacy across generations (Archibald, 2008; Hare, 2012; Reyhner & Eder, 2017; Absolon, 2022; Worl, 1998). Storytelling is the central means of transmitting culture and identity.

Relational Accountability and Community-Centered Education

These findings focused on relational accountability within Indigenous education. Participants concurred regarding the importance of engaging the Indigenous community, including elders, Tribal members, educators, and leaders, in the education of Native children. This aligns with Archibald’s (2008) Indigenous research methodologies, which emphasize relationality, reciprocity, and accountability to Indigenous education systems. Sage demonstrated these characteristics with families and the community by actively listening, establishing trust,

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and fostering collaboration, rather than attempting to “fix” them. Similarly, Copper highlighted that supporting children necessitates supporting parents and families. These findings contrasted with Western educational approaches that often marginalize Native families. Participants elevated Native families as holders of knowledge, primary educators, and cultural leaders within their homes. For example, Spruce was resolute regarding the importance of building relationships with the family system, which includes parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles—key elements essential for child development.

Educational Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination

Participants highlighted differences between Western educational systems and Indigenous educational values. They expressed concern over the underrepresentation of Indigenous perspectives within standardized curricula, which often fail to integrate Indigenous education in a manner that respects Indigenous identity and knowledge. Educational sovereignty was identified as the primary focus for Cedar Rose, who shared concerns regarding “what success looks like for us.” This perspective aligned with Brayboy’s (2005) Tribal Critical Race Theory, which contends that Indigenous educational history must be incorporated alongside the broader history of colonization and emphasizes the importance of sovereignty and self-determination within shared educational frameworks.

Participants also advocated for Indigenous education in both Indigenous schools and mainstream schools. Indigenous education would include Indigenous language programs; Tribal partnerships; Indigenous curriculum, such as the John McCoy (Iulilaš) Since Time Immemorial curriculum OSPI (n.d.); and culturally responsive teaching practices. Participants also cited the need for structural transformation, noting that Tribal communities lead Indigenous programs in curriculum and language instruction to support Native academic success. These findings remind

us that Indigenous educational sovereignty should be practiced beyond the classroom's cultural content.

Implications for Practice

This study demonstrates that Indigenous literacy encompasses more than standardized reading and writing. Educational institutions should recognize the significance of Indigenous education, which includes storytelling, oral traditions, land-based knowledge, language acquisition, and culturally relevant curricula, as valid forms of literacy. Second, Indigenous languages should be the primary focus of the early childhood education curriculum, with standardized English used for language acquisition. Participants agreed that this approach will support Native learners' educational success and help them become language carriers for their families and communities. Third, schools must collaborate with Indigenous communities to ensure Indigenous education is enacted. This requires relational accountability. In Washington State, the Office of Native Education in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction has a Tribal Consultation section where state and federal government agencies can consult with Tribes and provide input and feedback, including recommendations for Native programs and policies that impact Native student success.

Finally, teacher preparation programs should provide equitable access to professional development and ongoing training on implementing the Tribal curriculum and Indigenous literacy to enhance instructional practices. These programs should encompass Indigenous history, sovereignty, colonization, and culturally responsive pedagogy. All educators must respect Indigenous culture by ensuring accuracy in their teaching. To achieve this, meaningful collaboration with districts and schools is essential to facilitate educators' understanding of Indigenous education systems.

Recommendations for Future Research

Indigenous literacy can be integrated into Western educational frameworks to serve as models for Indigenous education systems, provided they are implemented correctly. Research efforts should focus on examining Indigenous literacy and storytelling within early childhood education environments, utilizing tribal frameworks and methodologies. Future investigations should also consider land-based literacy practices. The following recommendations are proposed: ethical literacy; Indigenous language instruction; professional development and training for educators in Indigenous education; Tribal curriculum development; storytelling and cultural competency; and the integration of Indigenous voices, oral traditions, and community-based participatory research methodologies. These recommendations will support collaboration with Indigenous leaders and educational institutions by incorporating stories that will support Native learners' English reading and writing development.

Conclusion

This study revealed that Indigenous literacy encompasses relational, cultural, and experiential components and is centered within the community. Participants agreed that literacy extends beyond mere reading and writing, and that Indigenous education can foster Native students' identity through storytelling, language, cultural knowledge, relationships, and survival. Additionally, the study observed that the academic success of Native students is evident when their learning environment honors language, culture, families, and community relationships. Indigenous education is crucial and must incorporate storytelling, Lushootseed instruction, and relational teachings as integral parts of the Indigenous curriculum.

Indigenous educational sovereignty was central to this study, which affirmed the role of Indigenous literacy and emphasized cultural continuity and relational accountability within early

childhood settings. Participants concurred that storytelling and language instruction facilitate healing, resilience, identity, and survival, thereby fostering academic success among Native students.

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APPENDIX A

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW STUDY

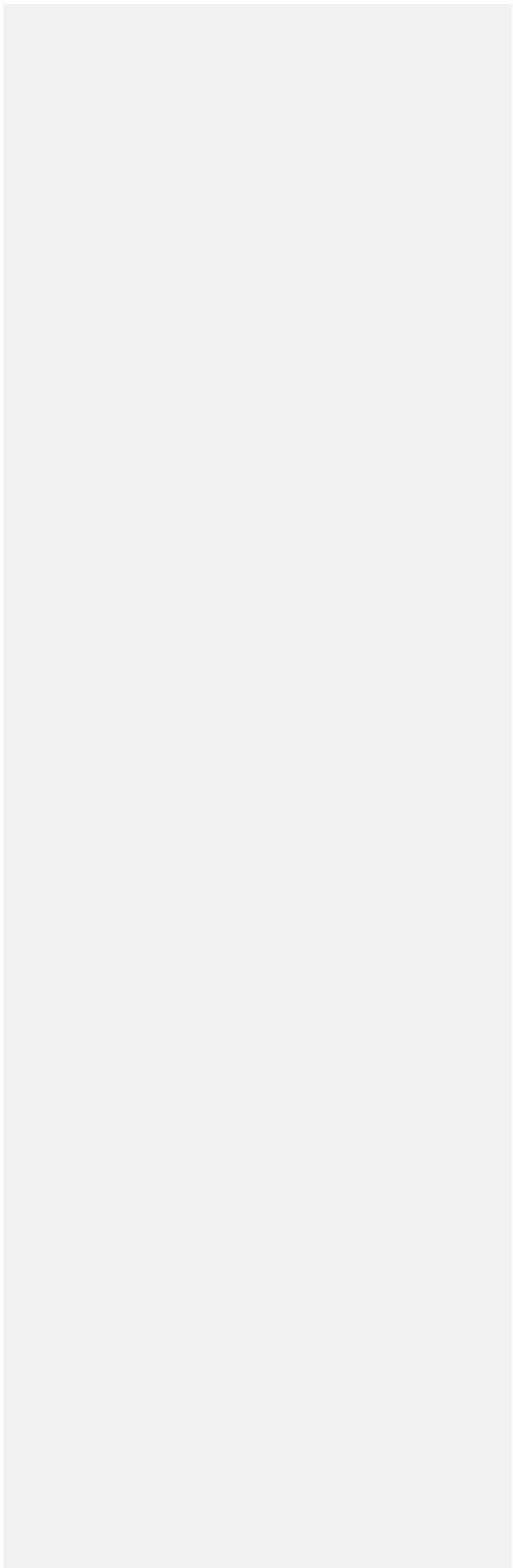
JOIN KAREN ELLIOTT
DOCTORAL CANDIDATE FOR
AN INTERVIEW

THIS STUDY IS GUIDED BY INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGIES
THAT VALUE STORYTELLING, RELATIONSHIPS, AND
RESPECT FOR COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE. PARTICIPANTS
ARE RECOGNIZED AS KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS, AND THEIR
VOICES ARE HONORED THROUGHOUT THIS RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
TACOMA MUCLESHOOT COHORT



APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM





DISSERTATION INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

At.oow: Indigenous Storywork and the
Teaching of Literacy in Indigenous Education



RESEARCHER
Karen Elliott, Doctoral Candidate
University of Washington Tacoma
Email: karenj10@uw.edu
Phone: 206-973-9817

FACULTY ADVISOR
Dr. Dawn Hardison-Stevens
University of Washington Tacoma

STUDY FOCUS
Exploring Indigenous literacy, storytelling, and language learning through the voices of educators, families, and community members.

INTRODUCTION
You are invited to participate in a research study about Indigenous literacy, education, and teaching practices. This study explores how educators, families, and communities support Indigenous students in English reading, writing, and Indigenous storytelling and language learning.
This research is grounded in Indigenous methodologies, including Indigenous Storywork and At.oow, which honor storytelling, relationships, and cultural knowledge.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this study is to understand:
• What public education systems are doing to support Indigenous student success
• What Indigenous educators and communities are doing to support literacy and learning
• How storytelling, language, and cultural practices shape literacy development

PROCEDURES
If you agree to participate:
• You will take part in an interview lasting approximately 45–60 minutes
• The interview may be conducted in person or via Zoom
• With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded
• You may skip any question or stop the interview at any time

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Your participation is completely voluntary.
• You may refuse to answer any question
• You may stop participating at any time without penalty
• Your decision will not affect your relationship with any organization

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
There are minimal risks involved in this study. Some questions may involve reflecting on personal or professional experiences. You may skip any question that makes you uncomfortable.

BENEFITS
While there may be no direct benefit to you, your participation may:
• Support Indigenous education research
• Help improve literacy practices for Indigenous students
• Contribute to community-centered educational approaches

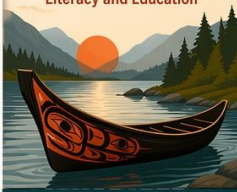
CONFIDENTIALITY
• Your identity will be kept confidential unless you choose to be identified
• Pseudonyms may be used in all written reports
• Audio recordings will be securely stored and only accessed by the researcher
• Data will be used only for dissertation and academic purposes

CULTURAL RESPECT AND RELATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY
This study follows Indigenous research principles that respect:
• Storytelling as knowledge
• Community relationships
• Cultural teachings and responsibilities
You are welcome to share only what you feel is appropriate. Your voice and knowledge will be treated with respect and care.

COMPENSATION
You will not receive compensation for your participation.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have questions about this study, please contact:
Karen Elliott
Email: karenj10@uw.edu
Phone: 206-973-9817
For questions about your rights as a participant, contact:
University of Washington Human Subjects Division
Email: hsdinfo@uw.edu

SHARE YOUR STORY. SHAPE THE FUTURE.
Help Strengthen Indigenous Literacy and Education



We invite Indigenous educators, language teachers, families, and community members to participate in a dissertation research study. Your voice and experiences will help inform how storytelling, language, and cultural practices support Indigenous student success.

WE ARE SEEKING PARTICIPANTS WHO:

- > Teach or support literacy in Indigenous education settings
- > Teach or practice Indigenous language (e.g., Lushootsed)
- > Are a parent, caregiver, or family member of an Indigenous student
- > Carry community knowledge about storytelling and learning

WHAT PARTICIPATION INVOLVES:

- One interview (45–60 minutes) in person or via Zoom
- Your participation is voluntary and confidential
- Your story, your way – share what you are comfortable with

INTERESTED?
Scan the QR code to learn more and sign up for an interview.



<https://bit.ly/At.oow-Study>

QUESTIONS?
Karen Elliott
karenj10@uw.edu
206-973-9817

CONSENT STATEMENT
Please check and sign below:

☐ I have read and understand the information above

☐ I voluntarily agree to participate in this study

☐ I agree to audio recording (optional)

Participant Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher Signature: _____

Date: _____

PREFERENCES (OPTIONAL)

☐ I would like my name to be used to honor my contribution

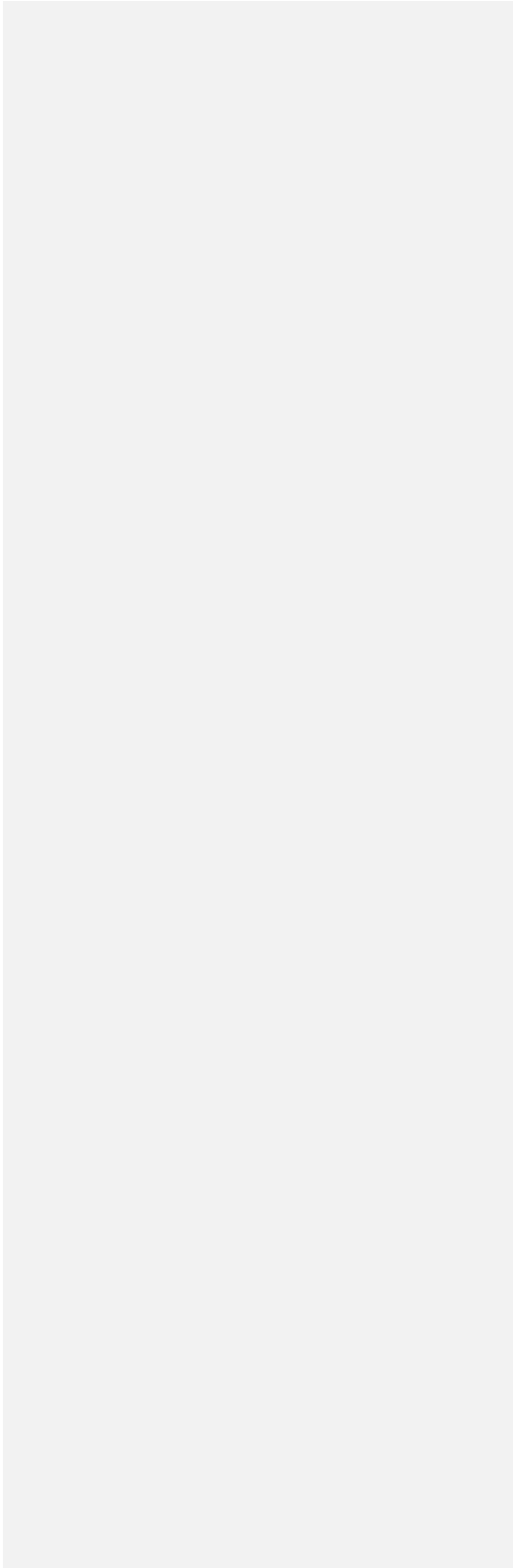
☐ I prefer to remain anonymous

Thank you for considering this opportunity to share your knowledge and help strengthen Indigenous education and literacy.

Hay čx̣̌ q̣̌ə – We are grateful.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS



Butterfly Transcript**Speaker 1**

All right, this is Karen Elliott, and I am continuing with Butterfly. And just some quick questions. Can you tell me about your teaching background?

Speaker 2

Oh, I have been teaching for about 28 years. The last school that I was at, I was there for 14 years, and here at Head Start for almost four years now. So I've been doing it a long time.

Speaker 1

How do you approach literacy instruction?

Speaker 2

By talking with the children, telling them stories, flashcards, books, writing, all those kinds of things.

Speaker 1

What does culturally responsive teaching mean to you?

Speaker 2

It means being respectful of different cultures and their beliefs, and how they teach in those areas.

Speaker 1

What exposures have you had to Indigenous education? Like maybe trainings and stuff.

Speaker 2

I've done a couple of trainings here. When I first started, I don't remember what they were, though.

Yes, I did take the Lushootsee class a year ago. I did another one not too long ago, too, and I think it was on culture at the... the cultural center in Lacey. Yes, I did that. It was a week-long, a weekend-long training there. So that was really interesting too.

Speaker 1

Are you familiar with the local tribal community?

Speaker 2

As far as knowing some of the families, yes. Especially for the kids in my class.

Speaker 1

How do you incorporate students with cultural backgrounds? And do you bring community or, actually, let's go to this other one. Do you bring community or family knowledge to the class?

Speaker 2

I do. We have had a couple kids in our class whose families are from Nisqually, and we've had them come in and talk to the kids about different types of foods that they cook and talk about how they farmed on the land and lived off the land when they were small children. And so that was really interesting to learn.

Speaker 1

How is our Nisqually Head Start supporting you with culture in the classroom?

Speaker 2

They bring language into the classroom, which is phenomenal. I love it. They also have the librarians who bring in different cultural books that we get to read with. We're learning songs and how to count in the shoot seeds. So yeah, we've watched a couple videos, so it's pretty. Pretty. It's pretty cool. I love it.

Speaker 1

What professional development would help you?

Speaker 2

I don't want to say necessarily professional development that would help. Well, the language, -I'm trying to learn the language. It's very difficult. I can't get my tongue to do some of the roles that you have to do with in the Lushootsee language. So I just think maybe more cultural family nights and, you know, revolving around the language.

Speaker 1

For a new teacher, what advice would you give them?

Speaker 2

Oh, my goodness. I would say be open, be loving, be respectful, and be courteous to everybody around you and in your surrounding areas. The native culture is a wonderful thing, and I wish more people were more in tune with it.

Speaker 1

And the last question is, is there anything that you would like to share? And what would you like others to understand about your work? Either question.

Speaker 2

What I would like for people to understand about our work is it's not like childcare. It's a learning facility. We're teaching young minds how to grow and how to, oh my gosh, I just lost my train of thought. We're teaching them how to grow and how to learn how to, you know, focus on their emotions and to thrive in the outer world, you know. We're a preschool, so they're going to be going into kindergarten, and they need to learn, you know, different cultures and people come from, you know, many different places, and I think that's really important to share with everybody.

Speaker 1

Thank you, Butterfly. That's all the questions that I have, and I really appreciate you.

Speaker 2

You're welcome.

Cedar Rose Interview**Speaker 1**

I recognize your role and responsibility within the Nisqually community.

And the conversation honors Indigenous ways of knowing, storytelling, and cultural teaching. You may skip any questions, and your response will remain confidential.

So the first one is identity, role, and responsibility. Can you share about your role in the community or tribal leadership?

Speaker 2

00:48

Yes, my role in the community is the Nisqually Vice Chairwoman.

And I'm one of seven tribal leaders who were elected, and it seems like every tribe goes through a lot of tumultuous...

This political activity, and it's part of our intergenerational trauma that...

That we don't always practice respect toward one another laterally, right? And so, a lot of times we push people.

People into leadership positions, and we think that we're gonna see instantaneous change, but they don't realize that it kind of takes time to move and adjust.

And so I think a lot of times we churn people in and out, and then we put so much pressure on leaders, and we burn them out, but...

I'm a part of a group of seven, and I feel like we're really well balanced.

We have XXXX, who likes public speaking; we have XXXX, who's an IT person; and we have XXXX, who...

Those are finance.

Noreen, who's an elder.

She's very adept in natural resources and fisheries, and then you have me, who's, like, education and leadership, and so I feel like we have a really strong, balanced,

Council right now. We're trying to do the best that we can to address...

Like, community needs together, so that's kind of our role at this point.

Speaker 1

What responsibilities come with your role?

Speaker 2

02:29

Specifically for Vice Chair, it's a strong leadership position.

Because the chairman... the chairman serves at the will of the general body.

And that means the chairperson has to enact their... their voice.

If they want, want, or need something, he is supposed to represent their needs to the rest of us council, because we're voting decision makers, and he's not.

And so that's a very strong role.

And a heavy responsibility for one individual to carry. And...

I, as a vice chair, I'm his backup, and so...

I'm a leader for the other seven voting members, but I've always got to be cognizant that anytime he needs support and backup, I've got to kind of...

Be both.

So the vice chair role is kind of pivotal and can move and adjust, or I'm supposed to be very versatile.

Speaker 1

What teachings guide your work and decision-making?

Speaker 2

03:32

I think the primary thing that's driven me throughout my life is the matriarchal leadership, and that's not to say that we haven't had very strong men leaders.

I love and respect all of our men leaders that we've had, but I just recognize how...

Leadership is a little bit about having bossy grandmas and aunties, you know?

They are the ones who will always tell you like it is, but they tell you from the heart, and so people really listen to that, because

Because our... our harsh words come from a loving place.

And I think there's really no replacement for that.

Let me see, I've been... I read about it, and... Follow it quite often.

Kind of those matriarchal, what people think about it, and that's really what I get from it, is that it just comes from a place of connection. In fact, I just heard something about it yesterday. It comes from a connection, that mother-child loving bond.

That's what matriarchal leadership is based upon.

Speaker 1

How do you define literacy from the community perspective?

Speaker 2

When I was a young child,

So my grandparents and my great-grandparents were in the era... my great-grandparents were in the era where they were decimating. The California governor put out a price on all natives' heads, and so people would actually earn money by going to kill the Native people.

And so, we're all aware, like, it was genocide, and it brought our populations very down... down very low, and...

They were in a time where people...

Even if they wanted to be Native, and that's all that they knew, they had to try to be something else, right?

So people, one, could not be Native. And then, secondly, with my grandparents, that was ingrained into their behavior, their mindset, their mentality, and their socioeconomic positions, that you had to try to emulate or be like the white people, and so...

They didn't try to have a connection with languages and with culture, dances, songs, spiritual ways.

Because it was...

Because society was kind of afraid of it, and so then my parents came around, and they weren't...

They weren't entirely brought up in that space because

One, they were just in a form of survivance, right? There was just nothing available. There were no lands, no resources, no money, no food, no housing, no clothes, but they couldn't have their basic needs met, and so...

When my parents got into college, they began to have civil rights activism.

Of course, they were... they were both in that mindset of...

Trying to build free will to be who we are, and...

And there's a whole complex story related to that, about who they are, but simplification, they were a part of that cultural revitalization movement between the 60s and 70s, and I was born in 72.

And...

I was right there along with them as they were fighting for the right to be Native American, to be Indigenous, to be Indian in the United States.

And so they were working to bring that back to their people. They were called upon many times from California to Washington, like, come here, do this, do that, create these programs.

Help us find grant funding, and so they were kind of in the mix of all of that. One of the projects that they did was they worked to...

To archive pictures?

And they worked to record and interview elders.

Yeah, they did a lot of language recording, stories, songs, historical, and

My dad was just saying a couple of days ago, he's like, yeah, we did all of that work, and he said the tribes didn't have,

Structures in place to protect it.

If it's still alive, we don't know, or some of it's gone.

My mom was also saying, during her stuff, like, she filed her thesis

She had two master's theses. She filed them both with Puyallup Tribe.

Nisqually Tribe, and with the Washington State Archives, and when we were looking for her research, it was nowhere to be found.

So the colleges didn't have it. They said that they didn't archive it. We went to UC Davis, DQU, and Santa Rosa State.

We went to Washington State...

Library here, where she did file it, and it wasn't there. So...

What she said was that she was very careful. She said people had to be very careful with what they wrote when they were in college during that time, because she said she never published hers, and she said it was because people stole their work.

How do you know that they stole it? And she's like, because it would disappear, and secondly, they would produce new literature from it.

It was their own, and they didn't give credit to the people who wrote it, so it was a weird time back then. So they lost a lot of the recordings and the songs, but one thing they did was build this language module called No Malaki.

And when we were little, they started,

they had recordings; we had tapes and stuff, and then they built little booklets where we would learn, and we would be intergenerational learning circles, and I remember they would take us down to the JOM building.

And we would all sit on the floor and the carpet in a circle with the elder who was leading the teachings. Then we would all practice and learn together.

Speaker 1

10:31

That's amazing, yeah.

Speaker 2

10:33

I was a... I was one early language learner. I don't... I wouldn't call us fluent, but we learned as much as we could during that time.

So that was an early experience. I think it's,

Amazingly, the languages have lived.

And that we're revitalizing them. One thing I'm concerned about, though, is, like, the infighting, because, like, in Nisqually, we have a lot of language keepers, but they don't talk to one another. They have disagreements about the meanings and the pronunciations, too.

So I feel like even though we're bringing in this... this good knowledge and good medicine and rebuilding our connection to the past.

I feel like those intergenerational traumas are still kind of, like.

Preventing us from being whole with our languages.

Speaker 1

What role do storytelling and traditions play in the community?

Speaker 2

Let me see... I think mostly, like, what I really appreciate...

is, like, from the Head Start program, right? That's where we send all our little children, you know, when their minds are just so open, and they're so curious, and they're so...

They can soak things up so quickly. But we send them there because they... that's where they learn manners, you know, and they listen to the aunties and stuff, and so it's really cool. But I think stories are like that, too.

Like, stories are meant to help you form who you are as a person. That's why I think they're so important.

Is that not everybody's the same, but we don't want to go and make all of the mistakes people made in the past, so you want to kind of listen to those stories and understand

From other people's perspectives.

And sometimes you don't always get it.

Like, when...

When your grandma's telling you something, or your uncle or auntie is telling you something, and you don't always get what they're trying... what exactly they're trying to say to you, but later, after you let it marinate a little bit, you're like.

I see, they were trying to give me a hint.

So I think they're helpful in that way; they're helpful in kind of growing who you are.

Speaker 1

And what does it mean for a child to be educated in your community?

Speaker 2

13:15

That's part of what I'm trying to work on: is that we value... I would like to see us value.

Cultural and traditional knowledge as A primary education, right?

Because right now, it seems like we're trying to fit into the Westernized world, into the non-native school districts, and...

Being treated so poorly.

Like, they give us the last choice in the classes. They give us... they don't follow up when a child is struggling; they won't reach out to the families.

Whereas if you're in a... if you're in an Indigenous community.

Everybody knows everybody, right? And so a grandma, or an auntie, or an uncle, or somebody's gonna reach out and talk to you.

And I really love that about Wahilut, because when you're down at Wahilut, there's only... 85 students.

Every student knows every teacher. They make certain that all of the teachers are part of an educational community.

And they invite the families in all the time, and so that... that level of relationality, I think, is...

Part of why their educational system works.

But an education is... it means... to me, it would mean that somebody

has the capacity to learn, and children really can't learn when they're feeling bad about themselves, right? If they have all Fs, or they haven't made it to school because they didn't have clean clothes, or they missed the bus, or, you know, they don't have support at home, or... something. I feel like education means capacity to learn.

Speaker 1

And so, how is knowledge understood in something owned or carried?

Speaker 2

16:01

Well, I was thinking about... Oh, be carried, That's part of, I think, valuing who we are.

As individual peoples, as individual, you know, bloodlines and heritage and culture and families.

that...

I really wish we could place more emphasis on the value of who we are as Nisqually people first, and so children, when they have that.

They have a basis of being able to shield themselves from the things that happen outside.

Right? When the school districts don't treat us right, or... Like, sometimes yum.

Their bus line fails to come out here sometimes.

They have a budget cut, and they know their bus drivers aren't gonna show up, or they can't pay them, or whatever's happening.

They'll shut our bus line off, and you're supposed to catch the bus at something like 6.55, and they tell us at 7:10 that the bus isn't gonna make it.

And so you got all these kids who are ready for school, and you got their parents who are like, okay, school's important, I make sure my kid's at the bus stop, and then you're sitting there, and no bus shows up. And then the parents have to make... have to go to work.

So, it's just unbelievable; it's like... If we,

I really wish we could build that owning and that respecting who we are as Nisqually, because I think it would be such a strength to shield us from all of those things that happen outside in the other side of the world.

Speaker 1

What responsibilities come with sharing knowledge?

Speaker 2

18:02

I think, like, a responsibility to do it in a good way, and I know those are kind of like... I forgot what you call the words. They're not empty words.

like...

I don't know everybody's beliefs, but you can do things in a good way, in a bad way, and if you do things in a bad way where you don't carry your spirit with you, you can actually harm people, right?

And so, to do things in a good way, you have to do it from a good place in your heart. You have to...

Share knowledge in a way that you're...

Helping people be stronger, and helping people heal, and helping people grow, helping people with their capacity.

So I think it's a responsibility to work on healing yourself.

So that you do do good things, in a good way, and that you're bringing healing to your people.

Speaker 1

Will we help out with protection?

Speaker 2

19:20

Yeah, I think protection is... protection is really vitally important.

Taking care of yourself, taking care of your spirit.

It's vitally important. I mean, there's...

I think they teach us just ways, like, we don't think of it like protection, like...

They know, we know if you're having a hard day, or you went through something, or...

You just don't feel like yourself. You go down, you touch the water, and you wash yourself off.

And so they just teach you... teach you different things, but I think those are ways to protect yourself.

Speaker 1

How should schools approach Indigenous knowledge respectfully?

Speaker 2

20:14

So I've been paying really close attention to this, you know, in my work with the school district, Yelm School District, and North Thurston, and

North Thurston is... Yelm is going backward in time.

So they had built up all of these ways that they were connecting with the squally, and now they've completely abolished all of it, and they don't care.

And I don't know if that's a sign of, like, our presidential... Climate right now.

Where, you know, over Trump's last session and his new session, that things have, like, racism has just continued to surface and resurface. I don't know if it's a matter of that, or if it's just a matter of the economy being hard, or...

Or we don't have the leaders who are demanding that they correct that and turn around, but... YOM is deteriorating fast.

And on the other hand, we have North Thurston School District.

Who has maintained a solid relationship with us. And it might not always be perfect.

And they might struggle, too, with authentic...

relationality, and they might struggle in certain areas where they don't do things quite right, but I give them credit because they're trying, you know, they're making space.

Even in the brand new high school that they built, when you walk in the front doors, and you... the first door on your...

right side is the Native Learning Center, and it is a room quite a bit about as big as this classroom right here that's all dedicated to the Native students, and so it's right there at the front door. Nobody can miss it coming in, and so to me, that signifies that it's important to the school.

That our students are important to the school.

And so, maintaining those relationships, And,

I think continuing to work on what's best, like that strengths-based approach, continue to work with them on what they're doing that is right.

I think it's always a good first

approach to take, rather than condemning things... condemning them for things that are not working out perfectly, because if we can continue to strengthen what's going well.

And then later, what's not going well, I think, is gonna diminish if we just maintain our strong partnership.

Speaker 1

How about this one? How do stories connect children to land and community?

Speaker 2

23:34

Oh, yeah. I really feel like,

A lot of times, the stories don't only use people.

And... When children are young, they have that kind of magical thinking, that imagination.

That they're able not to be so constrained. Like us, we're constrained. We think black and white, yes or no, all the

everything we view in the world, things we've seen work, so we're... we're too far gone.

But children, they're so open and imaginative. They have that... that magic connection to, kind of, like, the... closer to the spirit world than we are.

Mmm...

When you tell them... when you work on a story, you tell them a story, and they hear that connection with the animals, and the land, and the places.

I think that really speaks to them spiritually, too.

And that reinforces their connection, because I just...

I remember so much more from my childhood about just being stronger... more strongly connected to the land.

But I think we can reinforce that through our language, because of how the languages are built. The languages already have that connection. Like, everything is, like, what do you call it, onomatopoeia?

Where it's the sound, the animal is, like, the sound and the name that we give it, so there's more connection, actually, to nature.

So I think our languages can be healing in that manner.

Speaker 1

How do you see public education supporting Indigenous students? And I think you touched on most of that.

Speaker 2

25:28

Yes, I think one of the most important parts... so when you go to school, right, you're leaving your home, you're leaving your community, you're leaving your family, you're leaving your reservation or your neighborhood.

And you're going out to someplace somewhere else.

And it's a place that's owned and run by other people, by outsiders, and...

So that can be a little bit destabilizing for anybody, and...

It's hard on your own identity when you're in a place, like, you don't have that level of security, and so I think it mostly happens to, you know, like, teenagers, where they get self-conscious, and they don't know if they fit in.

And so there's a lot of psychological factors there. I think one of the good ways schools are working is that they're incorporating a Native identity, like they're acknowledging the land, they're bringing in, you know, artwork, depictions, names, native programs, and I think they're helping us feel like our identity matters, you know, like, we're okay to be ourselves, like, we don't have to change to fit in.

So that's one of the core things I think is really important for schools to support Native students. Indigenous education is making certain that we feel like we fit in, and like there's nothing wrong with us when we get there.

Speaker 1

What should schools understand about Indigenous learners?

Speaker 2

27:09

that... That we learn through story work.

That not all tribes are the same,

But not just Indigenous learners, but all learners, that there's no one way that people take in education, you know, there's various forms of learning.

So I guess just accepting that they, That we don't all do the banking learning, the lecture and the student, and the information comes straight to us, like...

It's just more land-based pedagogy, different styles of teaching.

I don't know, that's kind of the basics.

Speaker 1

How can schools better partner with tribes?

Speaker 2

28:14

Thank you. I see the struggles; one is,

I think allowing us to have some of our own liaisons in education

People inside the school are a big factor.

Because I even remember that from my experience in school, in high school, when we got a JOM coordinator.

Knowing that we had somebody there who we could go to when something was going on was really big.

So I guess it's that security when you move away from the res, and you have that feeling of instability. If you have someplace to go, or somebody you know who's there, kind of in

your corner, or got your back, or a resource person, I think it's important to have some of our people inside of the school district.

Speaker 1

And what role should tribal knowledge have in the schools?

Speaker 2

29:08

Much larger than it does now. I think curriculum does need a lot of work, and...

And that's been the struggle, that... the age-old struggle, right?

Oh.

I think in my mom's stuff, I found an old- it wasn't a dictionary, and it wasn't an encyclopedia. It was an educational study book. I should bring it in and show you guys.

It's just unbelievable; it's, like, super old, but this is where they got all of their knowledge from.

And it's just interesting to see the different ways that people view education.

Like, I've taken, I've gone to Waldorf School before, in the first grade, and it was totally, like, land-based, and...

in... I was in kindergarten and... or first grade, and...

All we did was learn through play, right? We played all day long. We read books, we did forts, we did, like.

Characters; we were all different characters, we went outside, they used that kind of magic thinking.

But I think education can be something totally different than it is now, and I think it definitely needs to be reimaged. If we... in a perfect world, I would love for us to run a

K-12 school plus a college or university on the reservation that's accessible to all Native students.

Speaker 1

And what is the importance of Indigenous language for youth?

Speaker 2

30:58

To me, I think it's like medicine. They say that the language is the way that we'll... we connect.

Connect to the ancestors, and... connect to our traditional ways, and that sometimes we don't even know or realize how powerful language can be. So I think it's definitely a healing factor.

And it's probably gonna be one of those things, like, if we really, truly want to get past all of the intergenerational trauma, I think we're gonna have to... Welcome language back into our lives.

Speaker 1

What revitalization efforts are happening in... at Nisqually?

Speaker 2

31:43

Oh, They have a language program; they're bringing language into all of the places, everywhere you go, you can see it.

And it starts at an early age.

The accessibility is growing.

So I think it's really been a positive shift for us, and I think we have a good basis for building... continuing to build the language program right now.

Speaker 1

And what challenges exist?

Speaker 2

32:14

The challenges exist between the lateral violence, people not appreciating one another, or... Not giving other people credit, and kind of those... Colonialistic behaviors like individualism and competition, of people trying to be better than the other one, or just not getting along. It's really... It's extremely harmful.

Speaker 1

And how can schools support these efforts?

Speaker 2

So we have language in some of the schools right now, through our language program. We have our teachers go out.

I think if the schools would honor the language as course credit and allow it to be a full class on its own, it would be a good thing. But I think the schools are now welcoming the language in, which is very positive.

Speaker 1

What is your vision for Indigenous education?

Speaker 2

33:37

My vision is that the tribe is A strong support system.

Instead of sitting back and relying on schools, our tribe stands up and

And works to ensure that these things are happening, that we're on a constant rise to having Indigenous education and curriculum happening at the schools.

And having the support systems here at the tribe as well,

The tutoring and all of the programs that... where we can help children be successful in both areas, right?

So I just want us to be a lot stronger as a people.

To be more connected, to not have so much lateral violence breaking ourselves down, and to really have an educational system here at the tribe.

Not just a department,

To have a really strong system where everybody is committed, and where we connect to our parents, and...

Build their capacity, too, to support their students and their children in their lives.

So continual healing and capacity building is my vision.

Speaker 1

What does educational sovereignty look like to you?

Speaker 2

34:56

That means where we figure out what success looks like for us, and we...

Put in the work, the time, and the support to make that vision come true.

Speaker 1

And what advice would you give to educators?

Speaker 2

35:18

I would like to encourage more of our tribal people to become educators.

And, to really enjoy the work and be upheld, because...

I think maybe in the... it seems like in Westernized culture, educators are not held up to a level of respect that they need to be.

And it's the opposite in the Indigenous cultures, where educators are R...
revered, right? Because we look to them for everything.

So I hope that... I wish society would change to...

support educators more, because I really want them to feel valued for what they're doing for all of humanity.

Speaker 1

My closing question is, is there anything that you would like... any more things that you would like to share? Or, how would you like your knowledge and teachings to be honored in... in this research?

Speaker 2

36:22

I'm not sure; I'm really excited to see the...

The outcome of the research that you're doing, and how it will change somebody's future when another scholar comes through and reads what you have written.

And they take it to a whole other level. That's kind of how I see our research going forward: it's going to be another step to support the next person coming along, so that we can continue to rise.

Speaker 1

Oh, that gives me chills.

I'm gonna stop the recording. Thank you. How good goodness chish.

I really appreciate you participating.

And I'm gonna stop the recording.

Speaker 2

37:09

Okay.

Copper Transcript**Speaker 1**

Gunalcheesh/Hawaa, thank you for participating. The conversation is about learning from your experience as an educator. There are no right or wrong answers, and you may skip any questions; your responses will remain confidential. The first question is opening and relational protocols. Can you share about your role and your connection to the Head Start program in the community?

Speaker 2

I am currently the Family Services and ERSIE supervisor for Nisqually Head Start. I've done that for two years. Previously, I was Family Services Coordinator, and before that, I was a toddler teacher in this community. So, in total, I've been here a little over seven years.

Speaker 1

What brought you to this work with young children and families?

Speaker 2

I have always wanted to work with children. As life does, it pushes you into other paths. And then when I found the opportunity to go back to school and learn what I love, I did, and my professor in college said, "I think you would love and thrive at a tribal Head Start." So an opening came up. I interviewed. I knew nothing about Head Start, but I had all the love in the world for working with little ones, this age group. Yeah.

Speaker 1

And how do you see your role in supporting children from birth to legacy in your program?

Speaker 2

I feel that my role to support children is to support their parents. I believe that that's where it all starts within the triad of parent relationship, child relationship. And then we come in to kind of help with that, to facilitate what they need from us. So that's what I feel like our role is to support that family because ultimately they'll leave us one day, but they will always be with their parents. So if we can guide the parents in the direction that they need, and only when they need it, That's how we best serve our children.

Speaker 1

My next category is Indigenous Literacy and Learning. How do you define literacy within the Head Start program?

Speaker 2

By definition, literacy through Head Start, according to the feds, is the ability to understand written language and to be able to identify written language. In many ways, there are various ways of written language, and that's, like I said, the definition by what Head Start and primary Western culture want us to have. For me, it's storytelling. Literacy can be whatever we want it to be as long as we're passing down stories by sharing stories.

Speaker 1

In what way does the program support both English literacy and Indigenous ways of knowing, like storytelling, as you said, or language?

Speaker 2

I think by building a curriculum that is not only just following what our Head Start regulations are, because we still need to follow those regulations. We still need to honor these kids by teaching them the written language, but also by honoring not just our tribe, but whatever tribe or culture that a lot of these children in our program have in their lives. Storytelling plays a huge role because it's in multiple cultures. You know, storytelling. At one point, indigenous families and, you know, other families of color were not allowed to read. So that's how we pass literacy along, by storytelling. We honor that by having culture and language come in and tell stories, by Sweetgrass sharing stories through language. It's not so much the words that they can read, but also the stories that we're passing on through generations.

Speaker 1

What does success in literacy look like for children and families you serve?

Speaker 2

Of course, as you know, as educators, we want to say that it's the ability to, when they get to that age, to read, to identify sight words, to identify things like that, but also the storytelling part, being able to repeat a story because that means that I understand this. I understand the lesson that you're teaching me in the story. That's successful. I know how to tell this story to my friend. That's successful. And then connecting it, again, connecting it with what they need to know in school. Being able to identify things inside a story, being able to react, or what do you call it? Reenact. What they're reading by movement too. That's also fun. That's also part of literacy.

Speaker 1

And how do you support teachers in integrating cultural knowledge into literacy instruction?

Speaker 2

I 100% challenge teachers to make sure that that's part of their curriculum. It can be difficult when you're not, you know, indigenous or when you're not of a culture that plays an important role because I think that they don't want to, I think that they don't want to step on toes or offend

anybody or seem like they're appropriating something. But they need to know what their role as a teacher in a Tribal Head Start is when it comes to storytelling and literacy. Like, you have to tell these stories. You have to teach this language, even if you're not great at it. I encourage you to try. That's super important. At least try. If you're not even trying, then you are not having any kind of respect for these children, you know, the culture and what they should be learning.

Speaker 1

Next is at.oow theoretical framework. How is cultural knowledge shared, protected, and respected within your program?

Speaker 2

I think that we take a lot of sensitivity, a lot of care when we are reaching out to utilize stories or songs or anything like that within the program. And also, within the Special Olympics program that I was part of, we were part of a pilot program that occurred maybe about four years ago, and that was the AIAN; it was the physical Special Olympics one. It was the actual young athletes. And then we incorporated that again with the young readers program. So, to make sure that we were being respectful of the Nisqually tribe, we were consistently working with the culture department. We were working with tribal council. At that time, it was Willie Frank. We got permission, of course. But when it came to the young readers program, I also made sure that I incorporated a tribal member who was part of the language department and another tribal member. Well, she's not from this tribe, but she's a community member who is very engaged in this community to make sure that we were following the right protocols: is it okay to use this, you know, is it okay? That we incorporate this story or this song. Because at that time, they wanted us to get deeper and use stories and songs that are beyond the books. But we had to be very careful, because a lot of the elder tribal members didn't want us even to use that. So I think that was really important is making sure that we're not just doing this all alone, that we're involving everybody important. That's part of that piece in this program. So reaching out is super important.

Speaker 1

That's exactly the attitude that we do.

Speaker 2

There you go.

Speaker 1

What responsibilities do educators and administrators carry when teaching indigenous knowledge to young children?

Speaker 2

First, they need to get it right. You need to have the right information, and you need to have it from the right source. And I feel like when you have it right, you need to keep it as simple and as pure as possible. Like, I understand you would want to add something to it, but that's not for you to do. That's not for you to decide. So, just involving the right people, having the right information, the correct information, and knowing where to source that information is important.

Speaker 1

How do you ensure that cultural teachings are shared in appropriate and respectful ways?

Speaker 2

Follow the lead of those that are teaching you. So, for example, our language person that comes into the school will explain to us, this is what we're working on, and this is how you do it, and what is acceptable. Like some, some teachers are really interested in breaking down the language so they can better understand. I forgot what that's called. It's like you're doing the phonics version of it.

Speaker 1

What about the sounds?

Speaker 2

The sounds too, so that they can learn it and teach it to the kids. And previous staff have been like, you don't, we don't do that. We're not going to do that. You're going to learn it just by saying it, and it's harder. So we'll take what is recommended; if we're told, like, this is the only way you can learn how to do it, then of course, that's what we're going to follow. Even if it's a little more difficult, it's worth it, you know. And it's important to encourage the kids kind of to be part of it. But always just respect what we're being asked of when we're utilizing the language in the classroom, because it's not ours to mess with.

Speaker 1

Storywork methodology that I'm using for this research. How do you see relationships shaping and learning in your program?

Speaker 2

It could be bumpy because we come from different worlds. We all come from different worlds. And teaching on an Indian reservation. You're abiding by different rules. This is a sovereign nation. If you come from a Western kind of civilization, a Western lens of education and of anything like time management, education, conversation, it can look different. So I think that we're all kind of learning how to be good, like good people here, and honor the teacher, the people that we're teaching, and honor the families that we're serving and show them some respect

on their own, on their own land. You know and understand where they're coming from. That just comes from, again, knowledge, making your kind of getting yourself to learn about the culture that you decided to work for.

Speaker 1

In what ways do you create a sense of belonging for children and families?

Speaker 2

I think I try to be available for them. I listen to them every day, and I definitely know that, like, our families and these kids, I'm available for them, but they don't need me. Like, I'm here to show them, like, you know, if you're- I'm here; I'm available for what you need. Well, I'm not here just to like to save you or anything like that. You know how some people get that mentality, like, "As you need me, I have this higher education. You're Head Start, and so obviously you have a need. I try to be with them how they want me to be with them.

Speaker 1

Yeah, how do you engage families, elders, or community members in children's learning?

Speaker 2

I think it's important to be out there in the community. That's the best way to do it. If like you're sharing what you're doing, if we're involving this entire community into our program and kind of share like, look at, this is what we do, this is what we teach, by sending pictures to the bulletin, you know, to Shunanam, and inviting them to come and see when we go on field trips to the ranch or to the garden, inviting them into policy council, just things like that. They can see the stuff that we're doing in the program, and they can know that this is their school because we have a lot of family members. We have a lot of elders that have grandkids here and just making sure they feel part of it. During our family nights, we offer parenting classes and our family circle, our family corner, where we exchange clothing, shoes, and groceries, so they know they're all part of this Head Start program.

Speaker 1

Can you share an example of a teaching moment that reflected cultural values and relational learning?

Speaker 2

Yes, and I can share it because it surprised me. It isn't my experience, but it was an experience shared with me that blew my mind. There was a person who had shared with me that she was having a conversation with a woman who came from South America. And she herself was Hispanic. She's Latina. So she was sharing this conversation they were having with each other,

and the other woman was upset. She didn't want to have anything to do with her. And she was wondering, why don't you want me to help you? We're the same. And the other woman had told her, we're not the same, you know, we're not at all, we come from two different worlds, like just because we speak the same language doesn't mean that we're the same people. You come from this Western world in the United States. And, you know, I don't. I come from something else. I have different lived experiences. So it really stopped and made me think because just because I share, like, an ethnicity or something with someone or I share, we share maybe a similar like culture, meaning like we're from the same kind of like community or whatever, doesn't mean we share the same lived experience. So it was a great example that was shared with me because it gives me an idea of, like, be careful what you're thinking when you're engaging with families. Know that their experience is different than mine, even if we grew up in the same neighborhood. So that helped me a lot.

Speaker 1

So the next category is on systems, leadership, and policy. What policies or structures support Indigenous education and cultural integration into your program?

Speaker 2

I think the flexibility of being able to do things like with our curriculum. Like we follow one certain curriculum, but we can add on to it to make it our own. We've got the luxury of the Farm to Table Act too with our food, our USDA. Like we can offer indigenous traditional foods to this area using our garden, using our fisheries, and that helps, like that helps with these kids because it keeps them in touch with who they are. I think being able to experience things like the ranch and doing mental health for children through their own cultural ways, such as the horse ranch with equine therapy, brings their culture into the mental health bubble for a lot of these families. A lot of the speech and language, we use the equine therapy for speech and language. It's a very non-traditional way as far as schools go, but it's a traditional way of learning here on the tribe. So I think that's a beautiful way of intertwining it.

Speaker 1

What challenges do you face in implementing culturally grounded literacy practice?

Speaker 2

I think, again, as I had said before, our educators, some of them, are nervous or scared of overstepping. And so they're afraid to apply the literacy part, the storytelling, the language. I think that they're nervous about it because they don't want to get it wrong. So they'll be a lot more tempted not to do it at all than to try at least, or even to reach out and say, hey, I need some help implementing all of this and stuff.

Speaker 1

And how do you support staff who may be non-indigenous and learning culturally responsive practices?

Speaker 2

Again, just getting them out there and saying you have to try, you know, you have to try. There's tons of resources to help you implement this in the class. You have XXXX, you have XXXX, the library. We have books, you know, we have XXXX at the horse ranch who teaches culturally responsive classes to people that are new to the tribe. XXXX can set up classes for you to learn. XXXX can do language classes next door for people. You know, there's lots of support. And I, like I tell them, like, the only reason why you can't do it is that you won't do it.

Speaker 1

How do you balance federal Head Start requirements with the community cultural priorities?

Speaker 2

I think, again, like I said, being an AIAN Head Start, I think that's what helps. There are some things that we're able to integrate into the program because of that; a lot of Head Starts are not. As I said, the one big one is the food thing: actually being able to serve traditional foods to our children. But it's also just, like, I think it's pretty flexible. Like, if you read the frameworks for Head Start, if you read the requirements for these children, it can go hand in hand with it. Like I said, the idea of literacy and storytelling and stuff like that, all of that can be in, can be connector. You can still do both. You just have to want to do it. It's a little more work, but when you think about where you're at, I think you kind of owe it to these kids to do it.

Speaker 1

The next category is family and community engagement. How do families contribute to children's literacy and learning in your program?

Speaker 2

I think families do it by participating in things like literacy nights. When we do have events, they do come. And a great resource is the library. Like, these parents are welcome to come and participate. I think the teachers play a huge role in getting them engaged in literacy in their classrooms. We try to do it by family nights, by constantly having something to do with literacy during family nights, you know, something. Also, natural resources are a great way to get them participating and, like, getting the kids out there and kind of learning a lot about their culture, a lot about storytelling and stuff like that. I think that we just kind of missed the boat. We worked with them a lot before and not so much this year.

Speaker 1

I know since COVID, we've just been doing so much restructuring.

Speaker 2

Right. I mean, like, over at Natural Resources, he has a great Smokey the Bear costume. I think he can only wear it, but I want them to come and do storytelling with our kids. Because they're an elder on this tribe, so it would be great to have them do it, but we just haven't been able to connect to get them here. Yeah.

Speaker 1

What strengths do families bring to the school that should be recognized more?

Speaker 2

I think everything. We don't have a school without the families and the kids, you know? The parents are what keep this together. Like, I get it, yeah, it's Head Start, it's free preschool, whatever. But like, when they enroll, they are required to be engaged. And we make sure, you know, that they are engaged by family nights, parent-teacher meetings, their monthly meetings, conferences, and any events that we do. They're always a huge part. I think lately I've been seeing an uptick in father engagement, and that's been beautiful. And that's what we want, just to keep pulling them in, pulling them in, being out there every morning when they come in and smiling and checking on their day and answering our calls when they need us, except for that one, answering our calls when they need us. Just things like that, just being a pleasant person for them, just letting them know that they're always welcome in this building, you know? And I think that's what helps, is just making them part of every day.

Speaker 1

How do you build trust and relationships with families?

Speaker 2

Like I said, just making sure that you're available for them. Keeping their confidentiality because a lot of families will come and tell you really rough things that that's going on in their life and they're counting on you to be Supportive confidential, you know and just you know being there for them because sometimes they just want to talk they don't want a result They don't want an answer, you know, and then just also letting them know about about their own strengths like, if I'm supporting you a little, I'm not lifting you up. I'm just kind of supporting you. You're doing all the work. You're the family. You're doing all the work. And just being consistent, keeping your word with their families. If they're asking you about something, they need something from you, be consistent. Be timely with your answer. And also be 100% honest with their families. Even if you have to have a hard conversation, your consistency with them and being honest- always being honest is going to be better for them than not being, you know what I mean? Yeah.

Speaker 1

So I have the last question, which is reflections and vision. What changes would you like to see in early childhood education for Indigenous children?

Speaker 2

In federally funded programs like ours, I'd like to see them loosen the reins on the kind of curricula that we have. I understand that we have a lot of these great curricula, but children survived and became educated even before we had preschools and schools. Children learned, and they learned literacy. They had literacy even before; I mean, it wasn't like, I just- I'm not choosing; we were told that we couldn't teach our children to read and write and stuff. So there were ways that other children learned. So I wish there was a little bit more flexibility with, like, choose your own curriculum and, of course, it's got to be right, and it's got to be good for children to be able to be successful in school. I think that having more Indigenous teachers would help. I see so very few of them. I wish that would be a part because you always want to see yourself in your classroom. You know, you always want to see what you can be, what you can do when you're older, too.

Speaker 1

What advice would you give to educators working with indigenous learners?

Speaker 2

Learn the culture. Learn the culture and understand the protocols. Watch your mouth because different sayings are set out there in, you know, Western education, Western schools that are not appropriate for programs, you know. Just think about who you're serving. Come in with no judgments. Be completely self-aware when you come into these programs because you're serving a whole community. You're serving a whole community. If you're not familiar with the culture of the community, make yourself familiar because you're the guest here. You're the guest.

Speaker 1

Is there anything else that you would like to share that feels important to your work?

Speaker 2

That feels important to my work. No, I'm just so grateful to be able to continue to serve here. I truly am. This community, as I've shared before, this community has saved my life, and that's a huge, long story. But like, I feel indebted to these children and to their families. And like I said, again, it's always about learning about these families because ultimately, these are their educators. We're helping them along, but these are their teachers. Those parents are their teachers. Yeah.

Speaker 1

Is there a story, teaching, or experience you would like to leave me with that reflects your work?
Is there any kind of a story you want to tell?

Speaker 2

I don't remember one. Maybe I can think of 1 and bring it back to you.

Speaker 1

You don't have to answer all my questions. And that was the last one too. Thank you for participating.

Speaker 2

Sure.

Speaker 1

And I'm gonna stop the recording now.

Speaker 2

Okay.

Flower Transcript**Speaker 1**

Okay. Gunalcheesh/ Hawa, thank you for participating. I honor you as your child's first teacher. This conversation is about your experience and your family's story. You may skip any questions, and your responses will remain confidential. The first section is Family and Identity.

Can you share about your family and child or children?

Speaker 2

00:50

Yeah, so my name is XXXX. I am Norll, Mukwintu, and Hoopa, so my tribal people come from present-day Northern California.

I am married to XXXX, who is enrolled Quinault, but also has deep ties to Yakima.

I have 3 kiddos.

My eldest is 11. She is also enrolled in Quinault, and she goes to Wahilut Indian School. And my middle son, Anahoy, is 7, also enrolled in Quinault and goes to Wahilut. And then my youngest is 5, and she is also enrolled in Quinault, and she attends Nisqually Head Start.

Speaker 1

01:40

Thank you! What a beautiful family!

I love your children.

Speaker 2

01:46

They love you.

Speaker 1

01:49

What does being a parent mean to you?

Speaker 2

01:58

It's the best gift. I guess I don't even want to necessarily say "achieve," because I feel like I'm still in the thick of it, but... You know, it's really, I feel like, a part of my identity.

Everything for my kids. So, going to school, being a good role model, deciding to quit drinking alcohol. Just everything that I do, I think, is reflective of how I want them to be when they grow up, right? Knowing that I'm... A role model, and...

But also the way that I approach things, the way that I react to things, is teaching them, right? So, like.

making sure that I'm always role modeling what it is to be

A good human, to be... to interact with other people, to interact...

With all living things, the way that we approach hunting and fishing, the way that we treat animals, the way that we respect the earth and the land and...

You know, just so many of those fundamental skills that shape how our children grow.

So I... I feel like so many of us are already teachers, and maybe that's why I love to teach myself.

But yeah, they're my greatest accomplishment, for sure.

Speaker 1

03:42

What value or teachings are important in your home?

Speaker 2

03:48

I think empathy is probably one of the biggest things, making sure that my... kids understand

That as a fundamental way of being, right, that extends beyond to all things.

And I think that's already kind of reflected even

within them at such a young age. I remember we just recently, you know, 4th of July.

was like... she just looked at me, and she goes, because they were having a... they were having so much fun, because, right, kids love fireworks, especially all of our new kids. But Taleo looked at me and goes, Mom, does this hurt this guy?

And I said.

That's a good question; I don't know. And she goes, I kind of feel bad. She goes, I wonder if it hurts this guy that we're doing this.

And I think... right, by...her just even having that critical thought about it, and being like, well, wait a minute, like, this is fun, and this is beautiful, right, to see all the pretty lights and colors, but she really thought about it, and like.

How does this impact, right? This guy. You know, she's 11, so she's older than the other two, but I think for her, it kind of really highlighted that. That is really a testament to the ways that we navigate.

And the more opportunities that we're able to go out and gather. So, you know, we've been harvesting cedar and...

One of the teachings and stuff like that, it said, thank the tree, right? Thank Mother Cedar. Thank you so much for sharing your bark with us and allowing us to use you, right, to... to make things, and to honor us with that.

And having the kids be out in the forest, and even Kosos, who's only for not know that. She'll not know that it's important that we think things, and that we... we move with empathy, and that we're grateful for what the world offers us, right? What...

Our plant relatives offer us,

And then even when we went to harvest camas, right, really just having those good intentions and good thoughts while we're digging, and just being thankful that we have the opportunity to be in relationship with the land, and...

Grandmother Camus and... and... And, you know, being able to harvest her.

Speaker 1

06:17

That's beautiful.

Speaker 2

06:20

Thank you.

Speaker 1

06:34

Oh, who helps your child? Like, family, elders, or community?

Speaker 2

Yeah, I think that's a,

I think a lot of people, right? Because, You know, she has me, her dad, and her grandpa.

XXXX, also lives with us, and that's her...

Her best friend is her grandpa, and she has a lot of opportunities to sit with them and be, you know, just around them and their influence.

But, you know, me, her dad, her siblings, I think she really looks up to her big sister and her big brother.

And I think...

You know, we don't really think of kids as teachers, but again, like, just the conversation that I had with you about Tallela and the fireworks.

teacher. And so, that's something that I always remind XXXX about, too, that whatever you do is that you're teaching, baby, right? The decisions that you and XXXX make, she's watching you guys. So, I think they play a huge role in her teaching as well.

My mom is definitely one of her huge teachers.

And she lives in Sacramento, so she only gets to come every, you know, so often.

But there's a lot of that love in that relationship as well.

And... And then, of course... Her aunties, her cousins, all of those

People were around all the time. You know, she's watching, and she's learning from everyone. And then also her Head Start teachers, who she has built such great relationships with,

And I think also, like, the extended aunties and uncles...

That aren't really her aunties and uncles like you, Karen.

And, you know, those adjacent aunties and uncles that are just in our...

They have communities who also have those influences on her as well.

Speaker 1

What does learning look like in your home?

Speaker 2

08:59

You know, I think it could be a whole... Bunch of different things, cooking.

Right, is one way that they learn, by being able to help, like, make cookies, and then during the holidays, and

build... houses.

sports. We come from a huge... my husband's entire family is, like, basketball is life, so I think there's a lot of teaching and skills that go into,

being in a basketball family. My husband is huge on leadership, and so he always talks to XXXX, And it's funny, because xxxx talks a lot to xxxx about it, you know: you're a leader, you need to act like a leader. You know, you don't follow what other people do; just because other people do it doesn't mean you need to. How are you stepping up and showing up when you see something wrong happening?

Bye.

And stick up for somebody. Always talking to XXXX about that. You're a leader. He tells her that at school. You're a leader; make sure you're not following the kids around. You tell the kids what to do. I'm like, Ted!

You're the leader. And she goes, but why, Grandpa? And he goes, because you're a leader, you know,

So I think just sometimes those conversations, and, and then a...

We always have the opportunity, like.

I've always heard you say how important it is to have books in your home, and

And we had books in my home growing up, and my mom always- I would see her on the couch reading. She would, like, kind of... You guys are all going to bed; I'm reading my book for a little bit.

So that kind of instilled that.

In me, was to read, and so I think sometimes by...

teaching is also by watching and learning, right? Observing those things. It's hard to tell your kids to do something when they never see you do it, and I think that kind of goes back to that mentorship piece and modeling what you're hoping your children do, so they...

And then having the opportunity to, like, lie in bed and read with them. So, we do reading, and then the kids, we always try to get them off their iPads, because they're terrible, but how are we sending them outside to play?

To just being in the backyard, right? Just be outside.

Learning from just doing that, doing those kinds of fundamental skills of, like, how do you keep yourself entertained, right? And not just always be bored, and we... my stepdad, he... he's a huge hunter, he comes from a huge hunting family, and so, the kids have also got to help us process elk and do that kind of stuff, right? Like, being in the kitchen at a table, and there's big...table, and they're watching my mom process the meat. And so the kids also have the opportunities to help us with that, or, like, be involved in the process, and sit at the table and watch us do things.

So... The same thing with fishing, right? Taking the kids out.

fish.

And watching how we take the fish off the hook, whether we're putting it back in the water, whether we're keeping it, gutting it, cooking it, I think all of those things are such critical pieces that,

I think my kids have had the opportunity to watch and learn and see things kind of in action.

So I think it kind of goes, you know, back and forth to those things: arts and crafts, having the opportunity.

to just have fun, and paint, or sidewalk chalk. Like, all of those things... Are so important for... their brain development, and...and exploring, and being able to be creative. I think a lot of times we don't acknowledge how important it is to be creative, or to have, you know, or...

Until when your kids are really...Good at those kinds of things.

I think, to XXXX, having the opportunity to powwow dance, and then again, how important is it for that?

For her to be doing those things, and to have her brother and sister watch, right?

What it means to powwow dance, and to learn those steps, and to learn the songs, and...

Yeah, teachings are just all around us, and it's hard that we separate it between what Western education looks like, right? And we separate that so much from the importance of culture.

Speaker 1

So, how does your child learn to read, write, or communicate?

Speaker 2

14:12

Well, I've had the...

benefit of having all my kids being very chatty, because they kind of get that from...

From me and my mom, my side of the family.

So they've all been really, really great at speaking. They've... They've not talked. But, okay, wait, repeat the question.

Speaker 1

How does your child learn to read, write, or communicate?

Speaker 2

14:45

Read, write, and communicate. I'll start with communicate.

One of the things that I'm huge on is use your words, right? When they're having a fit, when they're crying, I try to tell them, you have to let

know what's going wrong so I can try and help you. So, I think really leaning into vocalizing, right? I can't help you if you're just crying, because I don't know how to help you. But if you let me know what's going on- if you're having a certain kind of emotion, you're angry, you're frustrated, you got hurt, you don't feel good.

I can help you, right? I can help you work through those, either your emotions, those feelings.

The pain, but... so I'm always really huge on, like, please vocalize what's going on.

I think another thing, too, is... when I... I think being able to... I kind of like leaning into that as well; the vocalization is, like,

How do you express your emotions, or say sorry, like... back to that empathy kind of piece, like, if... if I... frustrated, and I lash out at one of the kids, I'll, like, immediately stop and, like, look and say, I'm super sorry, that was really rude. You know, I'm really frustrated, but that never gives me the right to take it out on you.

So kind of... Being able to use my own words and tell them, kind of, what's going on with me, right? I think helps teach them, and then... we, we like to read at home, and so the kids each, every night, fight who gets their book, who gets to choose the book, what book we're reading, they want to read this one, they want to... so sometimes we have enough time to read all the books, we're like, we're picking one book, we'll read this book tonight, and that book tomorrow. So kind of just lying in the bed with the kids and reading before sleep.

I think it's really huge,

And then we probably could do a little bit better at writing. Sometimes we'll get Code to sit there, and she'll write, you know, how to write her name.

And xxxx as well, and... And then xxxx has this whiteboard that he'll put up, because Anahoy was having a little bit of trouble with math, and so Trey had put...all the numbers, like, on the board, and so he'll sit there with Anahoy and practice them, or have xxxx fill in the, you know, 1 to 100, and, like, Cho will have some numbers filled in, and then xxxx will have to fill in the rest of them.

And then, you know, school...Provides a lot of great resources as well.

And being able to, like, lean into those resources, the flashcards with, like, sight words.

So I guess that's kind of really how we navigate that.

Speaker 1

What kinds of stories, books, or activities do you share?

Speaker 2

17:29

So I'm huge on getting Indigenous author books, having culturally relevant books.

And then also having, like, diverse books, right, so that we have a lot of, like, African American books, or different cultural books.

And... I think having them kind of also...

And seeing other cultures is really important and powerful for them, but also seeing the diversity of books. So, not necessarily just Native books, but right, having other people of color within stories and those kinds of things.

I think it was really huge for us to... I really tried to push away from doing the Disneys.

The Disney books, the Disney things,

And that way, they're actually getting a better look at people's cultures, and then also our culture.

I've even had, I have California Indian-styled kid books; I have, you know, Clink and Haida books in our home.

And I think that you even gave the kids one of them,

And so being able to have them see the different kinds of books- I have Pacific Northwest, like Coast Salish books, for the kids- so even different, you know, cultures within Indigenous identity.

It's really important, and then I'm really huge on age-appropriate books

Because sometimes you'll pick up a book that's... maybe a board book that's like, you know, the hard cardboard, and it's supposed to be... those are kind of more meant for, like, younger kids, but then they'll have too many words on them, and I'm like, oh, they're gonna get bored. Like, you learn that really quick when you're reading a story to a child when it's age-appropriate, because the little ones are like, this is, you know, it's too much on a page.

So if we... when we do have some of those books at home, what I do is, like, sometimes I won't read all of it; I'll read chunks of it, and then turn the page, because... to kind of keep her attention span.

But so when I go to buy books, I really look at that...

What age range is this for? Is this, is this... and then is it appropriate? Like, should this be in this age range, or is this more of, like, an unahoy book, because it has more words on it, more, you know, more stuff on the page? So I really like also look into that when I'm... You know, looking at books and stuff to purchase.

Speaker 1

How does your child show that they are learning?

Speaker 2

20:05

I think repeating... Repeating what she's learning is probably one of the biggest things.

And I know I've had conversations with you about this, but how important is it that she's getting language at Head Start now?

Because she comes home and teaches us stuff, and I... I think I share it too often with people; those are these stories, but I just... I think what it means, like... for my spirit to hear her come home and then, like, teach us words, and I'm like, how powerful it is that again, we think of teachers, right, and we think of what a teacher is. Again, I think a lot of times it's typically for older people, but when the 4-year-old's coming home and teaching us, it's, like, such a joy and an opportunity, and And then how she kind of... so she'll teach us the words, but then she'll also, like, she'll start to use it. And like, we were in the bathroom; I was getting her ready, I was getting her hair done, and she had already taught us that, you know, Ishud means family.

And we were sitting there, and she goes, Mom, a spider! So we saw a spider. And I was like, it's okay, it's not hurting anybody, like, leave it alone. And she goes.

Mom, where is he going? I was like, I don't know, XXXX, and she goes, I think he's looking for his e-shed. And so she had told me that, I think he's looking for his family, and I was like... and it was just so sweet, and I'm like, but see, she didn't... because she had already been teaching us that word, but then she also, like.

Like, that was now the replacement for family, right, was to say Ished. And I was like, it's just... and it just, like, almost made me, you know, I was, like, tearing up. I was like, God, that's so powerful and beautiful, and

So I think, you know, they teach us that they're learning

By... by doing, by showing us that... that they're picking it up.

And kind of putting it into... into practice, and... So...

Speaker 1

Do you use storytelling with your children?

Speaker 2

22:21

Yes.

Definitely. There's, and I always kind of, like joke about this, I tell XXXX sometimes, I was like, God, I feel... we feel so pan-Indigenous.

I have my California Indian stories, and then we have the Quinault stories, and then, you know, Trey is also Yakima. Still, he also grew up in Yakima, so a lot of words that he knows are in Sahaptin, and oh wait, that's not how you say it; it's like...

I can't remember the other word that they say for Yakima words, but he'll, you know, a lot of his words that he grew up learning are Yakima words, and so, we always crack up and...

There's... ways that we'll share different stories from our... those different, like, cultures, right? And, California, we have a lot of coyote stories.

And...

Then XXXX has Yakima stories, so, like, I'm a girl. And then what's really powerful is that when the school's actually implementing Since Time and World Curriculum.

XXXX will learn stories, and then XXXX will come home and share stories with us, the stories that they learned at school.

And, sometimes when we're traveling somewhere, you know, me and XXXX in the car will share stories.

And, we had recently learned the camas story from going camas digging, so the kids were also able to hear the, you know.

Grandmother XXXX, and how they, you know, their grandkids were starving, and so they had gone out into this, like, into the valley, and they were weeping, and then that's how Camus grew. But there's also a story in Wintu that is kind of similar to that, where the older man's son was... was pushing the wind out of the valley.

The one-two people, and this grandmother was digging, because all of their warriors couldn't be the older man's son.

And this grandmother was digging and digging, and they said they could hear something crying, and they kept digging, digging, and digging. And they dug up a baby when she was digging for roots, because she could hear the...

And they dug up this baby, and then they kept the baby, right, and then took care of the baby, and then the baby grew up. And they were the one who was able to beat Old Man's son, and the way they beat Old Man's son was by tricking them into a game, and he flung them into this... into the sky.

And that's how... that's how we have the sun in the sky, and Old Man's son had two daughters.

And they were crying that their dad was now in the sun, and so he said, do you want me to send you to them? And they said, yes, we want to go with our father. And so he flung the two daughters into the sky, and they're the ones who make up the moon.

Well. You know, so, like, being able to share those stories kind of and, like, the similarities and the differences, and...

You know, our own stories.

Speaker 1

25:24

Wow, I never heard that story before. I know my origin story, but your origin story, that's beautiful.

How do stories help your child understand who they are?

Speaker 2

25:43

I think it kind of goes back to...

being in relation to land, right? That we're not separate, and that...

Part of it, and that we come from it.

So I think it's really tied to their cultural identity as well. And it has all those teachings, right? It has those teachings of how we interact,

With all living things, with... with the land, with the water, and I think it has those core morals and values. That teacher who they are.

And the responsibility that we have.

Speaker 1

How is knowledge of your culture passed down in your family?

Speaker 2

27:04

I think it's by being shared and learned.

Right, it's... It's just...

Versus, like, an added thing. Like,

it's by all the ways that we do things. It's by going to community events, it's by showing up, it's by helping, it's by,

being there for our loved ones, it's by...

harvesting cedar, by digging camas, by going fishing, by going hunting, by going to general council meetings, by,

You know... making regalia, going to ceremony, it's... it just is who we are. It's not separate,

And so I think... It's just by... existing, essentially, because...

You know, our knowledge is tied to our culture. Our culture is tied to our knowledge.

And it's just the way that we navigate the world.

Speaker 1

Are there any teachings or traditions that require special respect?

Speaker 2

28:25

Yes.

I think a ton.

The first thing that came to mind is, like, elders, and, like, just the simple thing of, like, when you're somewhere, the elders go first, right, when you eat, is, like.

We wait for the elders to eat, and then we can get up and go.

I think it's by...

going to ceremony, so, like, in Hoopa, the flower dance ceremony is a woman's coming-of-age ceremony.

And the young girls aren't allowed to dance until they... until they've had their periods.

If they dance before then, then they're pretty much forfeiting their right to have a flower dance ceremony.

And so I think, you know, the kids want to dance, and they want to participate, but they have to respect and understand that. And sometimes it's not easy, right? When your 11-year-old's like, I want to dance with you, I'm old enough, I can... I can do this.

But it's those teachings and... And having respect for...

Hearing the word no, essentially, right? Even though they don't understand.

But it's just the way that it is, essentially.

So I think... All of those things kind of come into play, because it also helps them understand

different, you know, in different aspects as well, not just in ceremony. Always respecting your elders,

Never being disrespectful.

Yeah.

Speaker 1

How do you teach your child respect for culture and community?

Speaker 2

30:19

I think by role modeling.

Right? Again, kind of knowing that they watch what I do.

By making sure that I don't overreact to things. Yeah, they just, they watch you. And now it says my internet is unstable.

They watch what we do; they watch how we interact, and they watch for respect for protocols. If we don't know, ask. And then they also say, "If you don't know, then don't do it." It's kind of always something that I... we were taught, is like, if you're not sure if you're supposed to, then don't.

It's the best kind of way to do it.

And... you know, again, sometimes kids are like, but why? But why? And it's like, because...

That's the way it is, that's why. Yeah, and I think a lot of it, too, is that right by being there, you can't really teach them without being in community.

It's one of those things; it's like.

They won't know unless they're there. And yeah, how do we...

teach them those things without being within community, without showing up, without... and I think that's part of it, right, is having respect and stuff like that, is, like, that you show up.

You show up for your loved ones, you show up for your community.

But that's where we learn and grow and...

I mean, even me and her dad, right, is the aspect of, like, never... you're just a lifelong learner, and there's so much stuff to learn, and

that becoming... An elder is...

Is having those understandings and knowledge.

Speaker 1

And what role does language play in your home?

Speaker 2

32:16

I wish a bigger one.

But I would say...

And then, again, kind of that pan-Indigenous, right? I have, like, the Wintu words that I know, the Hoopa words I know, there's... there's Trace Yakima words, there's the Quinalt words, and then there's now Nisqually words.

But, you know, I didn't grow up in a house that... that had...

You know, that was afforded our language.

And then Trey, I know, didn't really grow up in a house either that...

Had language keepers or knowledge holders of the language.

But being able to, like, go to tribal school and learn different words.

So, again, it's a lot of those, like, just knowing different, different, like, little words.

And...

I think Koso's being the teacher in our house, right? They're the one that brings us home words and teaches us stuff, and...

And then it's really cool, too, because xxxx will say stuff, and then xxxx and xxxx will be like, wait, you know that? And they're like, yeah.

And... because they have the opportunity to have language class at Wahulu, and then so the kids are like, oh yeah, or they'll say, oh, no, this is how you say it, right? So then the three of them kind of, like.

Know all of these words, and

And it's just... it's so powerful.

To see that the three of them are having the opportunity to get that, and like, what will that look like, you know, in 10, 15, 20 years from now, if that continues, right? Having language, and what will those houses look like?

With all of the family knowing these words and, you know, ways to say things, in the shoot seat, and I think that's just so powerful.

So, I'm excited for that.

Speaker 1

And how has your experience been with your child's school?

Speaker 2

34:18

My Head Start child. Yeah, no, I'm just... just so beyond grateful for Nisqually Head Start, I think it... it...

Is, like, the feeling of safety.

And, you know, the kids have had to go to daycare, or, like, They'll call it,

you know, not necessarily Montessori, what's the...

It's like, they don't really call it daycare, but they're calling it, like, a school, but it's still definitely very much like a daycare.

I think just having the opportunity for my child to be able to, like, have the time to learn how to spell her name right before they're even in kindergarten, to learn their numbers, to learn the colors, the days of the week, to learn, you know, the shootsie words, to...

Kind of...

And to be in Esqually, I think it's- the teachers are all super respectful, and they care about your kids, and I think that also changes a lot, right? When... when you see that they value

The students, and... Here's

Because that's another really different thing, is that it's also really not just about the kids; it's about your entire family, right? So they ask questions about your family: who's in your house, who will your child talk to us about, right? So it extends just beyond

your kid; they want to know about your family, and we had to fill out those little forms that it's like, who does your kid always see, right? And so we're, like, filling it out, and we're like,

her auntie, you know, always comes over with their cousin Nino, but... and so it's like, you know, who will your kid talk to us about in class? I thought that was so cool that they would have that down there. And they have your pets.

And then our cat had passed away, like.

They were hit by a car, and so... but that was a really huge thing in our family, right? And so, xxxx had to learn about death.

And they didn't.

Their kid's crying, so then they knew that they were supposed to be sad.

But then just the continuous questions after that, right? Like, well, are they gonna come back? We're like, no baby, they're not coming back.

But then being able to talk to their teachers about that, right, that there's this traumatic experience happening, so then the teachers were able to kind of also support her with that.

understanding, and we're aware. So it's not only knowing that they value your whole family but also being able to talk to the teachers about those important things that are happening within your family, and having them also support your student, you know, your kid.

In that loving way.

Speaker 1

How, how does your school support your culture and values?

Speaker 2

Oh, awesome, because they'll ask. They ask, like, hey, so what tribe are you guys again? So we're like, you know, Quina, and Wintu, and Hoopa, and they're like, okay, they're like, are there any words that you want us to share with your kid at school? So they were asking if we had words that we wanted to teach the teachers

So then our teachers can teach our kids. And I was like, oh, I was like, every time I come here, I was like, I just love the school more and more every day. But that is so powerful, right? And they said, you know, they have some bilingual students that, like, you know, know Spanish, and one of the teachers speaks Spanish, and so they're like.

You know, but then they also ask you, what do you want us to teach your kid? Is there anything else, like, aside from the curriculum that we teach, that you want us to work on with your child? And,

You know, they don't just have your kid; they have a whole classroom of kids.

And so it's really powerful that they lean in in that way and ask. So I think they do a really great job honoring other cultures and the different students that come to their school.

Speaker 1

What are your hopes for your child's future?

Speaker 2

38:43

I think having passion...

to whatever they decide to do. I know college isn't for everyone; I'm definitely gonna, you know, try to channel them all that way.

I think because it changed my life.

But also giving them...

The tools they need to succeed, whether that be with college or not.

But again, kind of wanting them to have their own goals, even if they differ from what maybe my goals are for them.

I really want my kids to be able to succeed in whatever they do.

And part of that goes with, like, just believing in them, and I think giving them that strong foundation of responsibility, leadership, and learning.

And...

Speaker 1

The last question is, what advice would you give to your teachers?

To her teachers.

Speaker 2

39:59

It would be to incorporate more of this into the curriculum.

Or giving them more resources.

Of different kinds of curriculum that, you know, is Indigenous-focused and centered.

I know that, you know, it's a huge lift to get kids prepared for kindergarten.

And then they're gonna go into that system, though.

K-12, and then if they go on to college, then through the college system, how are we offering them knowledge about their tribal community and their tribal people?

In a way, that's more than just language. How are we sharing history with them? How are we...

Giving them opportunities to...

touch Cedar, right? Whether that be inside the classroom or outside the classroom, how are we having opportunities for them to learn more than just

what they're going to get for pretty much the rest of their duration in education. How are we offering them more time to learn about Nisqually history

To be able to share those stories, like, I don't know if the kids have ever had a storyteller come in and talk about how the Nisqually people came to be, right? To have them share their creation story, or to give them those kinds of,

Teachings that are equally as important

As teaching them, if not more.

How to write their name.

Cause they're gonna get that. They're gonna pick that up.

But how are we giving them those core and fundamental teachings?

That are so valuable, right? They have so many other lessons, too, about how you need to be and navigate the world, and...

How are we offering them those opportunities?

And I know I had mentioned the Since Time Memorial curriculum to Coast teachers last year, and they were like, oh, and they kind of, like, were almost so taken aback that they didn't even know about it, and I was like, wait, how do you guys not even know about this?

So I think more opportunities for them to branch out and see what... out there.

So focused on getting them into kindergarten, to how they were gonna grow up to be. And all these kids are gonna grow up and be adults.

How are we giving them the tools to be good adults, right? To have adults have empathy and morals and values.

Speaker 1

So now to my closing questions. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Or, how would you like your family's story to be honored in this research?

Speaker 2

42:56

Honestly, I would say I do want to make sure that it's acknowledged how much I appreciate the Nisqually Head Start School.

And... Just in the Nisqually Tribe in general, because they're so giving.

And... I think when...

we were moving. We moved from Shoreline; we had to buy a house, and we knew we weren't going to be able to afford a house there.

And we're like, do we go north, or do we go south? And we're like, south, because it's closer to Quinault, but we ended up so close right next to Nisqually that it was like, it...

felt like... like, everything that kept happening, like the Nisqually Head Start, Wahilu Indian School. Being so close to Nisqually, everything was supposed to be the way it was, right? That I... I knew we were in the right place. Like, we couldn't have... like, nothing could have... we couldn't have been in a better place. So really just honoring the Nisqually tribe for the gifts, and their hospitality.

To our family.

Speaker 1

Thank you, Pine, for participating in my research and the interviews. And everything is very valued to me about all of the answers that you've provided, and

Gunalcheesh/ Hawaa

And I'm gonna stop recording.

Sage Transcript**Speaker 1**

Thank you for participating. This interview honors Indigenous families' relationships and ways of knowing. You may skip any of these questions, and your participation is voluntary. And your responses will be kept confidential as outlined in the consent form. All right, my first section is role, identity, and relationships.

Can you share your role, family services, and connections to the community?

Speaker 2

Building the relationships with the families and getting to know them and vice versa and going from there, building off of their relationship and trust and learning from them and just listening to their needs and their wants and desires and trying to partner with the community and the resources out there to kind of plug in the spots that might help or be able to support the families with their different areas.

Speaker 1

What does working with families mean to you in this world?

Speaker 2

It means a lot to me. I love the relationship part of it and the connection, and I'm also learning a lot from our families myself. So I think the best thing for me is learning from the other people and building relationships and connecting.

Speaker 1

Well, that builds into the next question. How do you build your relationships with the families, caregivers, or children?

Speaker 2

Being open and genuinely listening and accepting them for who they are and what they've been through and just really partnering together, not trying to change anything or anything like that, just to support however I can support and what that might look like. To them? And then, what was the question again?

Speaker 1

How do you build your relationships with the families?

Speaker 2

Oh yeah, and then just staying consistent, trying to be consistent, and then just knowing everybody has different individual needs and different things going on. So, and then just trying to be there for them however I can.

Speaker 1

And how do your values or cultural teachings influence your work?

Speaker 2

Learning from other people and being open and trying to be accepting and acknowledge their beliefs and thoughts and stuff like that. You'll help me with my wording, right?

Speaker 1

How do you define literacy with families and the home environment?

Speaker 2

With literacy and the home environment, as I said, it goes off individual families' needs and what they've got going on, and trying to take their home language, their home values, and just their culture and put it into however that might be. With literacy, it's like reading, writing, talking, kind of thinking; it can kind of go in all together. So just support them in that different way and share that information with them.

Speaker 1

How do you support families in helping their children with reading and writing?

Speaker 2

Partner with families to collect resources, see what is important to them and their families, and what they value and want for their children. And then kind of go from there: what are the caregivers' strengths and interests, along with their children's, and go out and find resources and supplies, and partner together with them, and kind of go from there.

Speaker 1

What ways do families share stories and language or cultural teaching at home?

Speaker 2

At home, there are all different kinds of ways that they could tell stories. It could be written and/or it could be just verbal storytelling and their songs and dances. We can also work through things with dramatic play and puppets. So yeah.

Speaker 1

Are indigenous languages such as Lushootseed part of family learning? If so, how?

Speaker 2

Yeah, that's more of where, like, the teachers kind of work with the kiddos and their parents too, but we also, you know, partner together. There are some families, some parents, who are really interested in it, and we can partner with them and refer them to our language and culture department if we don't know ourselves or get them different tools to help them learn if they don't know. And if they do know, then we try to encourage them to share that with their children.

Speaker 1

How do families use storytelling to teach children?

Speaker 2

Talk about what they've experienced, their knowledge, and what they've gone through or what they've heard about and learning and just sharing the stuff that they know about. And then it gets passed down from generation to generation as long as we keep telling these stories.

Speaker 1

How do you honor family knowledge and experiences in your work?

Speaker 2

Be open and listen to the families, share their information, and let them talk and come in. We have an open-door policy, and we're always here, partnering with them to see what it is, how we can support, and what they want.

Speaker 1

How do you create space for family to share their voice and stories?

Speaker 2

We do, like I was saying, our open door policy, try to get it nice and comfy, cozy, never feeling judgey or anything like that. I don't want to push anybody away or shun anybody. And then just honoring, honoring the families and being respectful, I guess.

Speaker 1

How is knowledge passed down within families in your community?

Speaker 2

We have a lot of different community events that they get together. I would like to do more with the Head Start. We kind of talk about that too, but to have a place for everybody to get together and have a second home and a second family, and just to share stories and events and stuff amongst each other—person to person.

Speaker 1

How do you support families in sharing cultural teachings with their children?

Speaker 2

Give them opportunities to do it and let them know how important it is to keep their beliefs and their feelings aligned, because if we don't share that, then it kind of dies and it doesn't go anywhere if we don't keep it going.

Speaker 1

That's a good point.

Speaker 2

Just encourage them to share that information, keep it going, and explain how important it is. I do feel sad because some of those parents are like, they don't want them to speak a different language; they only want English, but it's so important. They don't- not all parents really know that, or they were taught, " Don't do that, it's bad, but we need to go back kind of and say that was never okay to be taken away. You know what I mean?

Speaker 1

How do you help families understand their role as knowledge holders?

Speaker 2

Try to listen to them and just encourage them and see what their worries are, or their insecurities and doubts, and then help them, you know, kind of point out their strengths and just encouraging words and to let them know like they're not alone. They got this, and just to try to find support, and however we can raise them.

Speaker 1

What challenges do families face in supporting their child's literacy?

Speaker 2

A lot of it not being available or accessible to them because it's all just like the English stuff that they, the outside is focusing on and pushing is their agenda and not their home base, their heart, like they all want it to be one and that's not really what people are here for.

Speaker 1

How does the education system support or limit indigenous families?

Speaker 2

It's not going very well, is what I'm hearing when I'm talking to different people and families. We need a lot more support. I do hear some schools are trying to incorporate the Nisqually tribe and spread more of it out there. But I do know, like, it's kind of a tricky, tricky situation because some of the knowledge keepers don't want outsiders to know some of the things they keep near and dear to them. But then some other people from that area do want to share. So it's kind of really hard. That's a tricky line, especially when I'm not native, you know what I mean? But I'm trying to support, and I can see where they're both coming from, like the people that want to keep it together and not.

Somebody was saying they're selling it to the white man, but it's hard to find that line, kind of, especially when I'm not native. And I just try to be respectful and do what they want me to do, what somebody might want me to do, but still at the same time, I have my values too, you know what I mean? And my heart would be to go and share and try to connect and spread a little bit of everything with everybody. Does that make sense? Mm-hmm. Okay. If I had not even been in the right question, I need the questions like, I'm sorry.

Speaker 1

How can programs like Head Start better support indigenous family literacy?

Speaker 2

I think we could definitely do a lot more intervention and moments and just providing opportunities to families.

Speaker 1

Can you share a story about a family's growth or success?

Speaker 2

Well, it kind of just depends. Like you asked me the other day, what do you consider success? Remember. So there are different families. I think that they just have all different things kind of going on. And just because if you have a little backslide doesn't mean you're not successful. The story keeps on going on. And then I do have stories where we partner together and see what their needs are and what they've got going on. And help find childcare, so the parents can go and do what they feel their calling is. I had one parent who was able to get back to school to do nursing, and so, yeah, it just kind of depends on what they've got going on.

Speaker 1

What is your vision for strengthening Indigenous literacy through families?

Speaker 2

My vision? I would like to see it like families just embrace it and be open to it if they're not really into it very much. Still, maybe, you know, let them experience it and be more open, and some people might not know. You know, I would just like everyone to be comfortable and thriving. I think to thrive, you've got to be kind of open and comfortable to take those next steps. You know what I mean?

Speaker 1

What teachings would you want future educators or family workers to carry forward?

Speaker 2

I would just like to have more of the elders coming in and talking and sharing what they have gone through. I know that, as an outsider, that was one of the things that kind of helped me understand where some people are coming from. The guy who said this to me said it in a way that offended me at first, but I kind of took my wallet down. There was a training when I first started working here. He said, I want you to come so we can see why we don't like white people. So that was hard for me, how he said it, but going and listening to these older people, sharing their experiences and their stories, that's how I really kind of got the veil pulled off my eyes. Does that make sense? It kind of touched me more than the other guy saying, I want you to come to see why we don't like white people. Right. But I have to put my own insecurities kind of aside and just be open. What was the question again?

Speaker 1

What teachings would you want future educators or family workers to carry forward?

Speaker 2

I just want real-life stories and what people have gone through and to learn from, if that makes sense. Yeah. And then I think it would be more meaningful that way.

Speaker 1

My closing questions are: you can answer both, or you can answer just one. Is there anything else you would like to share? Or how would you like your knowledge and family stories to be honored in this research?

How would you like this story to be honored? Your story.

Speaker 2

My story?

Speaker 1

To be honored within my research.

Speaker 2

Just be out there. Hopefully people will read it, be inspired themselves, and make a difference somehow, some way. Yeah. In a positive way.

Speaker 1

Great. Gunalcheesh, I'm gonna stop this.

Spruce Transcript**Speaker 1**

Okay. Hi, this is Karen Elliott. I am a doctoral student at the University of Washington Tacoma with the Muckleshoot cohort group. I am here to interview our staff at Nisqually Head Start. This is Spruce. Welcome, and thank you for participating. And if you can just state your name.

Speaker 2

Hi, my name is Spruce.

Speaker 1

Thank you. First of all, I wanted to ask you: how long have you been a teacher?

Speaker 2

I am going into my 23rd year as an educator. I've been an educator for 22 years.

Speaker 1

My dissertation is on Storywork methodologies. And it's rooted in at. oow theoretical work. And what that means is it's going to be more about your story than in an analytical way. And I just want to say that means thank you in Tlingit and Haida for participating. This interview honors Indigenous values, respect, relationships, and shared knowledge. And you also have the right to skip any questions you don't want to answer.

Speaker 2

Okay.

Speaker 1

And the first question is, can you share with me who you are as an educator?

Speaker 2

I am one of the kids that fell through the cracks when I was a little boy. I really struggled in grade school, middle school, and high school, and I didn't get any help from any of the important adults that were in my life. So I began my career as a teacher after my body started to break down because I used to do construction. And I remember my first four months of being a teacher; I was very depressed. I was like, oh man, because I came from a very construction worker-esque background. There were a lot of... norms that I had learned that I had to unlearn to be a teacher. And one of those norms was, oh, this is a woman's job. So the first four months of me being a teacher, I was depressed. I was like, you're just a babysitter. You're doing the work that, you know, you're just watching children for a living; you're not making an impact, and

where are you going and what are you doing with your life? Well, six months into my journey as a teacher, I had two families that were part of my classroom, and there were two single moms, and both of those single moms had children, and they were living in their car. I used a resource phone number list to help both of those moms find and get apartments, reestablish themselves for their families, and take care of their children. In the process of doing that work, it completely changed me on the inside of who I am, how I thought about this career field, and just how important this career field was. I spent the next seven years of my life working at that child care center before I accepted a job on Joint Base Lewis-McChord as a preschool teacher and a kindergarten teacher. I worked on Joint Base Lewis-McChord for another seven, almost eight years before I took a step away from teaching. Teaching can be one of those jobs that you can get burned out on, and I was experiencing probably the worst burnout I had ever had in my teaching career. So far. So I had to move on to something else. And I became a visitation supervisor for DCYF here in Washington State. I conducted monitored and supervised visits with foster children. And I worked on reunification with those families. And even though I did that job for a couple of years, I began missing the classroom environment. It's a very natural environment for me, and I love it. So I applied here at Nisqually Head Start, and I got hired, and I have been here ever since. And I've been here eight years, and I believe I'm going into my ninth year here at Nisqually.

Speaker 1

How do cultural values influence your teaching? And what relationships are most important in your classroom?

Speaker 2

I would say the most important relationships inside the classroom are the relationships with the families as a whole that we serve in this community—so building relationships, not just with the children that are inside the classroom, but also their family members, whether that is mom, dad, an auntie, uncle, or some grandparents. All that is super, super important. And it really drives me as a teacher because it works really well with my own morals and values as a teacher. And I would say that the most important relationship in the classroom is the whole relationship as a whole. It's really also important to individualize your relationships with the kids to make sure that you are building those relationships. So really important things that matter, like redirecting a child or scaffolding a particular activity for a child to help them grow, all of that stuff,—those interrelationships inside the classroom are really important, along with observation and anecdotal note-taking so that you could see and put down and try to understand where a child is at developmentally and then working that into individualized lesson plans. Because all of our kids are individuals and they're all growing, we want to support them in the best way that we can. And then what was the first question on that? I'm sorry, I got into that and I kind of found out.

Speaker 1

How do cultural values influence your teaching?

Speaker 2

So I'm a little bit of an odd bird. I grew up in extreme poverty, and I really didn't have a lot of cultural values put into my life as a child. So, when I spent my time working on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, I began working with families from all around the world: families from Russia, China, Korea, Australia, and South America. South Africa, the Middle East, and across Europe, and building relationships with these families, I came to understand how important cultural assimilation for the individual children was inside of the classroom. These kids tend to grow up knowing who they are, where they're from, what values their cultures hold, and this is all part of the foundational pieces of who they are as a person. And these foundational pieces begin in childhood, but at Airth, they continue to grow with them and go with them as they move up and forward into life. So what I learned about culture was that it is really important first to Learn Aspects of the culture of the children that I'm working with. That's number one.

The second thing is that, through guidance from family members, I implement cultural activities inside of the classroom. When you implement the cultural activities inside of a classroom, it gives children a sense of belonging, not just a belonging inside the classroom, but a belonging inside their own family. And when everything at home and everything inside the classroom are matching up, that's where the magic happens with the kids. That's when they're feeling comfortable; that's when they're feeling valued, loved, respected, honored, and not just for kids. That's also for their family members. Once you cross that barrier, everything else, when it comes to education, to me, that's a simple part. I'm playing with the kids. I'm utilizing parts of their culture, introducing it into the classroom. I'm learning. And that could be, for example, part of the culture: counting 1 to 10 is a big deal for all children, right? And so learning how to count in Korean and Russian, learning how to count in all these different languages and introducing that into the class, not just having me learn it, I'm helping the kids from the different cultural identities learn their home language and their cultural language. And there's also the exposure of the secondary languages to the other children inside the classroom, which also helps promote their development. So together, it really needs to be, in my opinion, that you put family and culture first. I believe that parents are the first teachers and the best teachers for any student who walks through my door. So I try to adapt and adjust and help grow and give unconditional love to each student that comes in, give that unconditional love to those families that come in, accept them for who they are, what their culture is, and honestly, the best part about that is you learn to love all these different cultures. You get all these different experiences. It opens up your mind. It's helped me kind of, for lack of better terminology, decolonize my brain a little bit when it comes to my own interactions of what I normally would think would be right and what I need to do versus asking the people that know if it makes sense. So culture's a really big part. It's a huge part inside of any classroom. You'll have culture from their family. You'll have your classroom culture, which is a different animal by itself. And then you have your own personal culture. And any time you have a bunch of cultures come together, the best thing, in my opinion, that anybody

could do is to take a step back and then support the culture that matters. And the culture that matters is the individualization of each child that comes in through that door. Because that's what we're doing as educators. We're lifting these families. We're lifting these kids. Kids, we're helping them grow. We're helping them achieve development, you know. Development is going to take place whether you're there or not. It's just a lot better when you have somebody that has your hand and helps you through it.

Speaker 1

How do you define literacy?

Speaker 2

How I define literacy inside of my classroom is the growth of the children's understanding of the exposures and the curriculum inside the classroom to help their knowledge base of literacy grow and the development of their own personal literacy grow. The best way I have found to do that is to lean on experts in the field. For instance, here at Nisqually, we have a whole Nisqually department. And when that comes in, they do stories. They also teach the children words. They teach the children how to use different sounds that may not be in their first language to say those words. Their Nisqually otseed alphabet is also posted in the room.

Then, with guidance from Nisqually language experts, they help the children understand the different kinds of letters and the sounds in the Nisqually otseed language, which is Lushootseed. The dynamic is individualized for Nisqually. In regards to The children, at the same time, we're developing the love for learning, love for reading, love for words, helping them connect the dots and do the scaffolding when they see, oh, my name starts with the letter E, and then helping them learn the letters, starting simplistic with like the letters in their name, and expanding the development and the understanding of words have meaning, letters have sounds, sounds make up words, and that's each word that's on a page, even if it's just a short sentence. Usually the children that we're working with, we have a much smaller word count inside the books, but that still is a good starting point to be able to help them understand that words have meaning and words are important and then wrapping it around with the culture that is that is of the Nisqually tribe and taking that and turning that into what the children are learning inside the classroom. So I hope that answered the question. That's kind of how I run things inside of my classroom. I'm always putting the families, the children, and the culture first, because without any of that, we're not a school. We're not; I don't feel like I'm being an educator unless I'm honoring the diversity of families and kids that come inside the classroom. Everybody deserves a teacher who cares, a teacher who doesn't quit, and a teacher who will love families and students unconditionally to support their growth and development. And all that wraps into how we talk, what we say, what's in our books, what's on the walls. Every little aspect of the classroom should be inviting and help children develop their literacy. For example, in my classroom, I try to put books in every single developmental area. So it doesn't matter what area is their favorite; even if they're in the block area, maybe they're looking at a construction book and looking at how to build a house, and

they're using those blocks to build a house. Maybe they're in dramatic play, and they're pretending to cook breakfast, and they have a cookbook, and they're following the instructions in the cookbook to prepare and make that breakfast. Maybe they're down, and they want to be by themselves, and they're in the quiet area, and they're being quiet, but there's a book in there that talks about family dynamics of different cultures. Whether that's like a highlighted culture or like the culture that we are learning about at that time. And they're able to relate to the miniature dolls, the house, and the words in the book. So every single thing inside the classroom, it doesn't matter what area they're in, we're always trying to help them with their literacy growth. We are also trying to help them hear as many words as they can. A long time ago, one of the things that shocked me as a teacher was learning that by the age of three, children should have heard over 3 million spoken words. That fact right there is super important. I'm always sharing that with all of our families, and I'm always talking to the kids, just like I'm kind of just running on with this question. Words should be intentional, and you should use them in a way that's going to lift the classroom. And how you do that is by individualizing and lifting all the families and the kids that are attending.

Speaker 1

Can you describe a lesson connecting literacy and identity? And how do you support bilingual learners?

Speaker 2

So a good lesson that connects literacy and identity: we have these really wonderful little, tiny books that are developed specifically for Indigenous families. And inside those books, there aren't a lot of words, but there are words that really matter when it comes to what the kids in the classroom are learning. Inside the classroom, we have a three-year-old, and they're learning that this is my uncle. Maybe in one of those Indigenous books, uncle is called something else, but it's still uncle. We're still drawing the lines and connecting the dots between what the word is talking about and what the child knows in their own family units or knows what's going on, current events in their family's lives. So we're always trying to connect the dots or do the scaffolding. A lot of times we're using scaffolding inside the classroom.

Utilizing scaffolding in a way that supports the development of literacy inside the classroom, helping the bilingual children understand that the language that their family uses is beautiful. But we are also learning this language inside the classroom, and it's also beautiful. It's a really good thing. And then a lot of times we try to turn it into like games or fun things, things that really grab the attention of the children inside the classroom. And then we'll play a game called a mystery bag where the children reach into a bag and pull out an item. And that item we're going to say in their home language, and we're going to say, or their first language, and we're also going to say the item or whatever it is in English. And what you'll see is growth and development even with children that have, like, English as a second spoken language. They will still grow and develop with English. They are definitely still growing and developing with their first spoken

language We you tend to see a little more Maybe a little more what seems like delays what normal I guess people would call this is a delay because they're not saying so many words They're not doing this but whenever you have multiple languages being learned a child is always going to have to translate in their own head what the word is being said that's not in their first language into their first language to be able to have it make sense to them. So there is a lot of hand-holding, guidance, and direction that's given to the kids when it comes to that. And then we do the same thing for all the languages. So it doesn't matter what the language is. We're still going to implement different activities that do the same thing that help support the learning of that language.

Speaker 1

What knowledge is sacred or culturally owned?

Speaker 2

It really, really kind of showed me a part of the culture when I first began working for Nisqually. And I'm a storyteller. I love telling stories, especially if it's a story that's got no book and it's just hand gestures, voice fluctuation. Kids get so much from bookless stories. They love it. They eat it up, so do I. And I ended up meeting a storyteller on a retreat down in Lincoln City in Oregon. And we're all on the beach, and there's a fire going, and I have all these indigenous kids sitting around me, and I'm just like a big kid. I'm sitting there with them. And this is after what I went down there to work for, like to take care of the kids, right? Kind of like a childcare scenario. I stayed with the families and the kids and went down for story time, because, of course, I'm a teacher. I want to hear the stories. And I learned a story called Little Rabbit. I learned a story of how the sky got tall. I learned the story of the salmon people. And all it took was for the storyteller to say the story. And it's like I had to memorize. Because pictureless stories inside me for my learning style, I could see them in my head, and it just helps me learn, right? Well, this is when I was still working on Joint Base Lewis and McChord for the Army as a teacher. And I had no idea culturally.

Nisqually Indian Tribe (2) Transcript**Speaker 1**

This is a continuation. Okay.

Speaker 2

Yes, sorry. So after I was down in Oregon, I learned these amazing stories. And I took them all back to Joint Base Lewis-McChord. And I started telling all these stories to all the kids inside my classroom because they were amazing life lessons. And one of the things I love as a teacher is to teach life lessons, things that kids are going to use their whole lives. Like responsibility and being caring and good character things that you would typically call good character: having a kind heart, sharing things like, I didn't make that mess, but it's still okay for me to pick it up, And so these stories went along the lines of good character moments for kids that they're developing at a young age. I was sharing them at school. The kids were eating them up. They loved them. They were asking for the stories. And I was thinking, this is the coolest thing in the world. I love it so much. And then the next time I was at a tribal event, because my wife also works for the Nisqually tribe. It was a tribal event. And I brought up that I was sharing the stories, and I was told, "Whoa, what are you doing? Those stories are the property of the storyteller. And that you don't share their stories. I felt so awful. Like I felt so bad. It's like when you walk into something, you're like, I know what I'm doing. This is a good story. The kids are going to love it. They're going to learn so much from this story. But I trampled all over the storyteller's intellectual property. I didn't use the same words as the person. And though the intention was honorable and good, what I really did was cultural appropriation. And to me, that's what it felt like. Like I stole a piece of what you do because it was good, and I gave it over here. And it was a real yucky feeling inside when I found that out. And it drove me to try to learn more about indigenous values and indigenous life and indigenous thinking and everything that I really would need to have to be successful working for a tribe, coming from a place of not knowing and then moving into a place that is knowing. I believe that, like the intellectual and the rights of stories, they belong to the storyteller now, and I've developed the understanding of why that is so. It's a little difficult, from my perspective, to put into words, but I can tell you that, through the course of learning about what makes things okay to use and not okay to use, permission is asking. Can I use this? This is amazing. These students are going to learn so much from this. And truth be told, I've done that a few times and it's really worked out. The last time I used it, I was writing a curriculum for Washington State special needs. They were doing a pilot program involving 3 tribes from Washington State for a special Washington Special Olympics. And I was writing a couple curriculum pieces for them. Using my knowledge of intellectual property and who owns what, I went to the person who wrote this cookbook. And I said, hey, you wrote this cookbook, and it has all these amazing recipes in it. And this person's an indigenous person. And I asked her, I said, hey, can I use your cookbook to create healthy answers for hydration and food? 'Cause all of the curriculum I was writing was for large motor development. It was all involving

that. And I also wanted to put a piece in there with healthy food and healthy habits and healthy- it's healthy to stay hydrated, right? I got permission to do that. It was a full conversation. Three recipes in there had other people's names on them that were gifted to that woman. And I told her I'm not going to use those because I have not spoken to those people and gotten permission to be able to utilize those with what I was trying to develop, to be able to not only help the families with Washington Special Olympics for Children, but also to make sure that I am learning important life lessons. And that was one of the important lessons of me being here: having that understanding. And I feel like I have the understanding, but I'm always still learning and growing as it goes. And so hopefully that answered your question. But in my own mind, that's the best way I can contribute, like a real experience that I had versus what the question was that you asked.

Speaker 1

How do you incorporate Indigenous teaching methods, and how do you create an Indigenous-centered classroom? And how do students practice reciprocity, and how do you assess literacy? How do you assess that?

Speaker 2

So my method is to create an environment that has the maximum amount of natural learning that could take place. So I'm introducing natural items into the classroom, and it's not like Montessori, where you use a lot of wooden things and stuff like that. It's like using nature as your guide for what you are bringing in and exposing the children to in class. Now, of course, you're gonna have all the kids like, oh, we love pokémon, right? That has nothing to do with what we're technically learning with the leaves and the sticks and the rocks and the natural items we're bringing in, or when we go on a walk, and we're learning about flowers and bushes and trees and all that. I still, as a teacher, let the kids govern part of what they're learning because they get the most out of their learning from their interests. I still do the pokémon thing. So that still happens inside the classroom. However, how I try to gauge what I'm doing and what I'm bringing to the table for these Indigenous families is to make the learning as naturalistic as I possibly can inside the classroom. Wow. And the next part is.

Speaker 1

How do you create an Indigenous-centered classroom?

Speaker 2

So the first thing that any staff member who is not Indigenous, who comes into an Indigenous environment, needs to understand is that the first thing that you put forward is having your classroom designed in a way that has everything you're wanting the children to learn about, with having the most exposure to the culture as possible. So an example of that is, earlier I spoke about having the Squali Oseed alphabet that the kids can go to and talk about. I have pictures of

different animals that get rotated out with their indigenous names that go around the classroom. I work hand in hand with the Nisqually Language Department, and they bring in activities for the kids to do. And I'm a student, just like the children are students, and I'm learning the Sqwali Otzi words, just like the children are learning the Sqwali Otzi words. Another tool that I use is these amazing recording buttons. So, fantastically, what the hardest thing for me as a teacher with the language would be is trying to put the language out fantastically and sound it out versus what it actually looks like. I want to hear how it sounds in English. But one of the things that my teacher, my Nisqually teacher, has shown me is that that's probably not the best method to really learn what it is. It does help. But I do agree, it's not necessarily the best method. But the recording buttons, we will record squaliozi words on there. We'll record them in English and how to say them in squaliozi. And the children that eat it up, they're always after those buttons. They're always pushing the buttons. We introduce, obviously, I do the natural things inside the classroom, but everything else, as long as I could put an indigenous touch on it, I think it's great, so like puzzles and games and books.

Books are important. Literacy is humongous, right? So books are really important—stuffed animals, puppets, art projects, every little aspect of the classroom. You should filter through an indigenous lens before you're putting it and implementing it inside the classroom. I'm the first teacher to tell you I've had flops. I've put stuff in there, and it's been like, oh, this is not going to work. Or I've had teachable moments for myself where I've had a Nisqually tribal member come to me like, I'm not sure, Teacher E, if that's really the best way to kind of do it. And I go, oh, please, teach me. Please help me learn. Honoring the culture is the number one thing for any of the educators that work here. That's the number one thing. There are some really obvious reasons that I really won't get into because it kind of veers away from answering the question. Still, like boarding schools, you know, Trail of Tears, the atrocities that happen to the indigenous people, stolen land, all these other things, break down into why it's so very important to utilize what you're learning from this indigenous tribe and introduce that into the classroom because so much has already been taken from them. So much. And the buck stops here. I will not take something from my indigenous brothers and sisters. I will not do it. I will support them. I will help their children learn their language. I will help them grow. And I'm going to do it by making sure my environment's on point. And when you walk into my classroom, you're going to be able to tell that it's an indigenous classroom from the drums that are on the shelf to the pictures and the artwork that's on the wall to the introduction of the different books and toys puzzles and all the little things that kind of make up the classroom environment, all of that stuff, it gets put through a filter and equity, inclusion, right? So equity, inclusion, right? And we want those things; we want the kids inside the class to feel it. And if you're coming from a place, a culture, and you go into an... for lack of a better term. This alien environment is not your culture; it's going to make it much harder to learn and develop versus feeling comfortable on the inside with, "This looks familiar." My mommy talks about this. My papa talks about that. Oh, uncle talks about this. All that stuff's important. And I do, I really try to make sure that the environment's on point when it comes to that stuff. You know, and I think that that answers that pretty good.

Speaker 1

How do you assess literacy?

Speaker 2

So, we have assessment tools that we utilize that will assess literacy, right? They're pretty basic tools, but they're enough for us to be able to establish if there could be a potential issue going on with the child. And we use a program called Teaching Strategies Gold, right? And for observations, for data input, and to be able to kind of work on the individual lesson plans for the children. But we also use the ASQ screening tool with ASQSE. The social-emotional tool gets utilized at home with the families because it's a questionnaire, and a lot of the questions in there are not questions that teachers can answer just because we don't live in their home; we don't know the answers. But the other part of the ASQ, we're able to use to see if there are things a child might need help with. But that is also like a blanket. It's more than just literacy.

There are a bunch of other developmental areas that we're screening for. But observation is important. Every single child, when you're working with them on literacy, you have to 1st get a baseline of what their skills are and what their knowledge base is. After you have, through anecdotal note-taking, established a baseline of what their knowledge base is, then you can start growing from there. And what guides us here at Head Start, and this is a Head Start facility, is our preschool readiness goals. So whenever we're working with the kids, we're always working toward the kindergarten readiness goals. We're always working with the children to try to achieve and get to those goals because most of the kids, even if they're indigenous and they're coming to an indigenous school, once they leave here, if they're not going to Wahulu, is that right? If they're not going to an indigenous school, they're getting put right into the public school system. And so really, it's doing a good thing for the kids; that's the one part of our class that really gets managed, I guess, by the feds, because the kindergarten readiness goals are specifically what we work on with each child to get them ready for kindergarten in our state, if that makes sense.

Speaker 1

What support does the school provide you?

Speaker 2

Oh man, they provide us so much support. So trainings upon trainings, and these are good things. I'm not saying it negatively, so like trainings and trainings and trainings and trainings. And in those trainings, there are all kinds of learning moments of stuff and things that I would have no idea about unless I was working for an indigenous school and went to those trainings. If you would ask an educator outside of a tribal education program, they'd be like, what? I believe they'd be like, what? Unless they've had some experience, or they're tribal, or they have family

members, or they have really close friends who are tribal, to kind of understand that I guess you would say. And what was the question again?

Speaker 1

What does Nisqually Head Start provide?

Speaker 2

We have an indigenous nutritionist who comes in and makes sure we get to experience culturally appropriate foods, okay? We have the trainings that I mentioned that will help train us in ways and methodologies that would be considered indigenous methodologies of teaching. So that's something that does take place. There is also the library that we work hand in hand with. There's the Nisqually Cultural Department that will come in and help us with stuff. There's the Nisqually Language Department that will come in and help us with stuff. They do community events, and going to those community events, you're going to be learning all kinds of stuff that you could bring inside the classroom from those community events and building relationships with people inside the community, which is a super important thing. Because I've been here for as long as I have, I consider myself a community member, and that's a responsibility, and it's an honor at the same time. So the responsibility part of it is that I'm going to take the things that I'm learning about the culture, and I'm going to introduce them inside the classroom in a developmentally appropriate way that the kids can learn and grow from them. And I think that's probably the best way to answer that. And I'm not remembering all the different avenues. There are so many ways that Nisqually helps out the school. And those are just some of the first ones that kind of stood out for me, but there's a whole long list of ways that they support us here at the school to make sure that we're running an Indigenous-led program.

Speaker 1

How do you navigate standardized curriculum?

Speaker 2

Well, I believe that curriculum should have standardization. And the reason I believe it should have standardization is that it's a way of ensuring that children are exposed to different developmental areas. However, with the standardization of the curriculum, I am doing emergent curriculum. I am meeting the kids where they're at. That's being sprinkled on top of the standardized curriculum. The curriculum that we do is standardized. It's standardized through policy. The federal government creates that policy through the Office of Head Start, and there are different developmental areas that we are required as Head Start teachers to be able to teach the children. Okay? All of those areas inside the classroom get touched on, whether it's physical, cognitive, or whatever the developmental area is; we're making sure that we are touching on those areas inside the class. However, with the standardization, you also run, this is just my opinion, you run the risk of really trying to push like a colonized lens of education to these Indigenous children, and that is like the last thing that we want to do as educators here for an Indigenous tribe.

We're going to take the standardization, we're going to work the curriculum individually, and then we're going to shape the curriculum to match better what I'd consider a more Indigenous-led curriculum. And a lot of it gets led by kids. I mentioned Pokémon earlier. That just happens to be the thing in my class right now. All the kids are super into Pokémon. And what I find as an educator is that children are going to learn and develop more in interest areas that they love versus a cookie-cutter, standardized, box-cut activity that I am going to say, we're doing this today. And then half of them are like, they lose interest, right? And they, or they don't want, just don't want to do it. They're like, no, I'd much rather be playing over here with this fishing game because I'm pretending to catch salmon with a net. versus come over here, and I want you to stack these five red blocks six times. So standardization is important because it has a teacher touch on all the bases with the different parts of the curriculum, but customization is a must. Customization is a must when you're working for an Indigenous tribe because you want the kids that come in the standardization in our classroom to be Indigenous-led and Indigenous-driven. When you take it and cookie-cutter it, it does no good for anybody. It makes me feel authentic as a teacher, and the kids pick up on that right away. You know, I always say the most important things inside the classroom are safety and consistency. And if you're faking it with an activity, kids know; they pick up on it. They're like, oh, that doesn't seem fun, right? However, if you take an activity through, like, an Indigenous lens, which I do to the best of my ability, and then make it fun. It's still promoting the same standards that you have when teaching, say, math, right, but you're utilizing it differently. That's kind of how I gear my classroom when it comes to the curriculum and how I support both using a standardized curriculum, but at the same time, catering it to the demography and the culture of the families that we're serving.

Speaker 1

Can you share a story about teaching literacy?

Speaker 2

Share a story about teaching literacy. Okay, let me see. What's a good one that I could bring up? So I like to teach stories where children help finish the words. So I make sure that when I'm reading with the kids, I always touch the words as I say them. I want them to have —because there are different learning types. You could have a kid that learns by just doing things, kinesthetic. You could have a child that's a visual learner, and by me touching the words or seeing and equating that those words have meaning, right? You could also have a child that just needs to sit there quietly with their eyes closed and listen, because that's where they're going to get most of their learning from, not from the overstimulated watching it, but from listening to it. So we use this book every year. It is not an Indigenous book. But as a preschool teacher, my philosophy is that the first hump that all preschoolers get over, and this is also from a lens of getting children that are transitioning from, like Early Head Start, that are coming in as like fresh three-year-old children or young three-year-old children, there is always this big speed bump of social-emotional development that they have to overcome. They have to learn. It's like this inner self thing. But once each one of those kids gets over that, there's an explosion of development on the other side. So basically, helping the kids feel as comfortable as they can inside the classroom. And then when it comes to the literacy part specifically, also helping them feel comfortable and celebrating what they can do, right? Exposing a scaffold for what they're not doing, and helping them build how to sound out consonants and vowels, how to string words together that are coherent and make sense, right? And oftentimes it's developmentally appropriate to say, I go, or it's like, me potty. It's like, I know that they're saying, I need to go to the bathroom, teacher Eric, but they're not saying it in those words. They're like, " Me potty right now, right? So stretching out their vocabulary is another good way to help teach literacy. So, like, if you could have them learn all kinds of new words, it translates over to what they're learning inside of a text or what they're learning inside of a book. So vocabulary is super, super important. Oh, another thing I forgot to mention that kind of matches some of the questions earlier: we have everything labeled. Like a kid's going to walk up and they're going to see this says chair, right? We also have things labeled in squaliozi. So they can walk up and go, oh, this says chair, but this says chair in a different way, right? So I guess that would be the best way that I could describe it. We're always going to- oh, the book, almost forgot to talk about the book. So there's this book called The Kissing Hand, okay? The Kissing Hand is about a little raccoon that was going to school for the first time and was scared, and... wanted to stay with his mom, right? And his mom told them they had a secret. And they took their hand, they kissed it, and closed it, and told them that any time he's feeling lonely or misses their family, all he has to do to feel his mom's love is put their hand to his cheek, and he can feel her love, right? So we start every school year with that. Because, for us to get to an environment of learning, we have to get to an environment of establishing relationships, of establishing trust, of establishing classroom guidelines. I try not to use the word rules because sometimes kids like to break rules. So I utilize words like agreements. We agree

we shouldn't run in class. We agree we shouldn't hit our friends because it hurts, you know, stuff like that. In regard to literacy, there's a really cool thing that we do when it comes to guiding the children inside the classroom. We use first and then with pictures. right? And words. So they're also getting, they're getting learning from that. And then we also have a list. I use pictures for children who may be nonverbal, and through the pictures and sometimes simple sign too, because simple sign, I think, is okay to use. With simple signs and pictures, the children can communicate inside the classroom, even if there is some kind of either A, a delay, or B, non-exposure, just not skill-based. They haven't built that skill yet. So all those things kind of tie together. And then inside the lesson plan, every single day, there has to be something that's literacy. Right? And those are the best ways. Through exposure and the right kind of guidance and scaffolding, you're going to be able to build them up and have them grow.

Speaker 1

What teaching should future educators learn? Future educators.

Speaker 2

Future educators should learn what teaching is, like teaching style, and what they should learn when they go to school to become educators.

Speaker 1

Yes, what would be the best advice you would give to a new teacher?

Speaker 2

To teach through love. My teaching philosophy is very simple. And it hasn't changed. Even in the very beginning, when I shared that I was super embarrassed to be a teacher because I had all this stigma, thoughts about it were like a woman's job, right? My philosophy has never changed. There was this one woman who said it to me once, and I've hung on to it ever since then. And that goes like this. First you have their hearts, and then you have their minds. In an effective educator, you have to work on that relationship with the student. That's the number one thing. If you build a really good relationship with a student and their family, it's a very holistic way of teaching. So I would say for future educators, I think that learning how to connect with the kids first, they're not, it's not a production line. We're not making F-150s at Ford's manufacturing plant. We're working with small minds and growing minds. And so, first, you have their hearts, and then you have their minds, and everything will fall into place after that. Because any person that's going to school to become an educator, they're going to learn the ins and outs of being an educator. But I really believe the first thing is not having fake educators. In my opinion, excuse me. In my opinion, I believe educators should teach through their heart. It's definitely a job where you have to teach through your heart because when you do, the kids see that. They pick up on that, and they love that. And they will grow more. It's kind of like watering a plant. Like you have this really cool strawberry plant. You love strawberries. You're like, oh man, I want to get

those strawberries to eat, but how do I get the strawberries? By consistently, and this is the same with kids, consistently watering it, consistently making sure it's getting enough light, consistently making sure that all the things that matter for that plant to grow happen, and what ends up happening, the result, is you get yummy, juicy, icy strawberries to be able to eat. It's so children, children, they're kind of like strawberry plants. And I guess that's the best way to answer that.

Speaker 1

That was the last of these questions, but in closing, is there anything else you would like to share? How should your story be honored? And are there any last things you want to share?

Speaker 2

I don't need any of the honor because the honor is not mine. The honor is not mine. Okay, the honor is for the families, is for the kids. They're the ones that should feel honored. When they feel honored, that's when you know you're doing the right thing. How should it be shared? I don't care. You could share it however you want. People could take from it what they like, and they can leave what they don't like. That's just an inside look at me as a teacher, my beliefs, and what I do. But I don't need any honor. It's not about that for me. It's more about the families that we're serving. And I think that ultimately, I think that's the way most teachers should feel. But again, that's just my opinion. It's not about me. It's about them.

Speaker 1

I want to thank you for participating in the work that I'm doing. As you said, this is heart work. And we are already doing our heart work. We don't get paid as much as we could. We're here because of our hearts. Sage and I talk about that all the time. We're not here for paychecks. We're here for our hearts and helping our families.

Speaker 2

And we all have our own separate reasons why we're here. Mine is because I was a kid that fell through the cracks. And I don't ever want to see that happen to any child.

Speaker 1

Yes

Speaker 2

Children deserve better.

Speaker 1

Children do.

Speaker 2

They do.

Speaker 1

I agree that everything I have learned through Circle Time and talking with you, or asking these questions, lines up with the study that I'm doing on Indigenous literacy in English reading and writing. While I was observing, one of the things that surprised me the most was singing when you and the class were singing the Lushootseed song, just doing the observation and asking these questions. Everything surprised me. Everything, Gunalcheesh, thank you.

Sweetgrass Transcript**Speaker 1**

Hello, gunalcheesh. This is Karen Elliott, and I am interviewing our Sweetgrass for Head Start Language. Okay, sorry about that. Sweetgrass. And so my opening, my first one is the opening relational. Protocol. Can you share your name, your role, and your connection to Lushootseed language and community?

Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, I'm Nisqually. My name is Sweetgrass. I am Nisqually and Chehalis. I live in Nisqually. I am from Chehalis, and I started learning the language in 2020. No, I believe it was the fall because it was right before COVID. It was the fall of 2019 at Northwest Indian College. And then I just started taking multiple classes everywhere because that was when COVID happened. And so they were doing a lot of Zoom classes. So I've taken classes with Muckleshoot. Tulalip, even though that's Northern dialect, so I do know a little bit of Northern. And then we are Southern, so there's Northern and Southern. And I'm taking classes with Snoqualmie, Puyallup, and Muckleshoot at Northwest Indian College. And what was part of the other question?

Speaker 1

Your connection, which you've already talked about.

Speaker 2

Oh, and then so we don't have any more first-language speakers, we rely on old recordings from first-language speakers and old documents from, like, the 1800s.

Speaker 1

Thank you. Who are your teachers and fluent or influences in learning Lushootseed?

Speaker 2

I have a bunch. I work in the Nisqually Language Resource Center as a language teacher, and I started a little over two years ago; April 1st, 2024, was my first day. I learned a lot from Puyallup and so many teachers, so let me back up: my first teacher was XXXX from Northwest Indian College, and then in Puyallup was XXXX. They were my main teacher. I've taken classes with Zeke. I don't remember how to pronounce their last name. XXXX, I think. And then XXX is the Nisqually Language Resource Center Manager, and I've learned Lushootseed from them.

Speaker 1

Thank you. What does it mean to you to teach the Lushootseed to the young children?

Speaker 2

What does it mean? It really helps with cultural identity. It strengthens their cultural identity and their resilience. And it's good to be culturally rooted in the language, especially since we don't have any more first-language speakers, so revitalizing it and preserving it is crucial so it can keep going for the longer term or for the next generation.

Speaker 1

Oh, so my next category is language and identity. How do you define literacy that includes Lushootseed language and culture? Define literacy and Lushootseed and culture.

Speaker 2

Define literacy? I don't really know what that's asking.

Speaker 1

Oh, okay. I forgot to mention because it's usually at the top of my thing, but if there are any questions, you can skip.

Speaker 2

Okay, just define literacy.

Speaker 1

Yes.

Speaker 2

I would say there are 42 letters in the Lushootseed language, and so there are a lot of letters that don't even sound anything like English, and it's just amazing to hear and see the kids at a young age pick it up, and they've never heard it before, and they can get the sounds just like that. And I've noticed with the littler kids, like the Head Start kids, their English may be challenging to them. And so they have- I'm not really sure how to word it. They struggle with pronunciation, but when they speak the language, it's clear. It's some of the, like, a child can say the bard L, and that's challenging, and they've never heard it before. And they just watch my lips; they watch my mouth, and they can say it. So like cha-sh, that means we. Cha-sh, so that's barrd L (ł). And they just, they, they pick it up just like that.

Speaker 1

What does Lushootseed play in shaping children's identity and sense of belonging?

Speaker 2

It brings them into their cultural identity. If they don't have that peace of who they are as a Native American, they can be lost when they grow up, or they can fill that missing piece if they

don't know who they are, where they came from, like what sovereignty is. I know it's a really young age to teach them at Head Start age, but I'm just saying in general to, like, you know, keep the kids culturally rooted as they grow up so they know what treaty rights are, what fishing rights are. And sovereignty and, you know, going to school and gathering natural materials for either making medicine or making basketry. So that's really important to teach the kids who we are as Native American people.

Speaker 1

Thank you. How do children respond to hearing and learning Lushootseed in the classroom?

Speaker 2

They get so excited. They are so excited. They know who I am. Even from the babies, the waddlers, they identify me with the language. They identify me with drumming and singing. As soon as they see me, they already know it's time to do language, and they get their drum and start singing. Or sometimes I feel like a rock star when I walk into the classroom. It's Teacher Sweetgrass! Yay! And that just makes me so happy. It makes me feel seen. It makes me feel proud. It makes me feel happy. And it just- I love it because the kids... And they're just curious, you know, how do you say this? How do you say that? How do you say this word? How do you say this word? And they just want to learn everything. And so it's just really neat to see the growth from day one to now, from September to April 29th. I can see the big change, and they just know so many words now, and they just go home, and they tell their parents, and/or they'll say, "That's not how you say it, Mom. You say it like this." So yeah, it's neat.

Speaker 1

So my next one is my at.oow theoretical framework and what responsibilities come with teaching Lushootseed language to children?

Speaker 2

The teachings that go behind it. Learning how to be respectful, not disrespectful, to use your manners, not to be bossy. Some of the children have emotional and social behavior, and to have patience. And to respect the language too, and uh because we don't have any more first language speakers and so it's important to keep the word in its original form so of course you know we're going to have new words such as house or stove or refrigerator because, you know, we didn't have those things a long time ago. So as words evolve, so does the language. So we have to figure out, okay, well, what would be a good word to, to, so it's, I don't want to say making up a word, but we didn't have words like refrigerator. So maybe we come up with a device that holds cold things or something like that. So, yeah.

Speaker 1

How do you ensure that language and culture teachings are shared respectfully and appropriately?

Speaker 2

Just reinforcing. You know, respect. You want to be respectful. Even in English, the kids will say, "Open my bag." I'm four years old, and I just stand there, and I say, Well, what do you say? And they'll say, and some won't even know because they don't know what to say. And so I'm just like, Oh, okay. So I'll be like, we say, please; we say our manners. And then, which is Nisqually language, we say, and that means please. And so I always encourage them to be respectful because when I was- I'm in my mid-50s or early 50s, and my teachings are strict. So I was always taught to say, please, thank you, and not to talk back. Don't be disrespectful. Be respectful. And the younger generation, they're very disrespectful at times. And so I just remind them to use their kind words.

Speaker 1

Thank you. Are there teaching words or stories that require special care when teaching? And how do you approach that? I feel like you said something a minute ago, like with the please and thank you.

Speaker 2

Yes, and another thing: sometimes people don't understand that English and Lushootseed are totally two different languages. And I try to tell my students not to think in English because the translations are not word for word or what you think it might be. For instance, that's rabbit. But the translation actually means wild ears because the ears are big and floppy. And so we don't have words that actually match in English, if that makes sense. What is another word? Guadil. Guadil means to sit down, but if you say saf guadil, so saf is a prefix, and so guadil is it. I'm not sure what the root word is. Still, anyways, saf is a prefix, and so that means a device, so that means a device of sitting. So it doesn't actually mean chair, but it does mean chair because it's actually like a device for sitting. And so, but in English it would be chair. Yeah, so just little things like that. Yeah, and some of our words come from the sounds, whatever it makes, like river, stolak, you know, river kind of stolak, stolak, stolak. Like that and then Crow the crow they say. So that's how they got their word. So it's like that means crow.

Speaker 1

Thank you. So my next Section is Story Work Principle from Archibald. So they talk about story work research. How do you use storytelling as part of your language teaching?

Speaker 2

Storytelling. There are sacred animals that mean different things, so I feel like a lot of our stories are not preserved. So I learned a lot of my teachings from my Chehalis family, and so, like, for us, Owls. There is a misconception about owls. So people think that when they see an Owl, it's automatic death. That isn't true. So there is a good Owl, and I don't want to say bad Owl, but because Owls bring messages. And so this is my teaching. And so a Snow Owl usually brings the message of death. But people think every time they see an Owl, it means death. And that's not true. Owls are wisdom. They're great hunters. They eat rats, snakes, and bugs, and they can see really well. So those are the type of teachings that I bring to the kids. Cool.

Speaker 1

How do relationships shape your teaching?

Speaker 2

Oh, having, well, you know, there are good relationships, and there are bad relationships. So good relationships and teaching are crucial for me, especially the transparency, being honest, truthful, you know, what works, what doesn't work. And also, when the teachers incorporate it into their curriculum, it really makes a difference. Because if it's just me, and I'm only in there 15 to a half hour a day, that's not enough time. I feel like the teachers need to work with them every day, all day- not all day, but you know, maybe they map out a time: okay, you know, 10, 15, every day we're going to go over review or whatever, something like that. And there is one class that already does that, and it shows, and that class thrives, and they probably know- I'm going to say with everything- they probably know maybe 50 to 60 words. Yeah, yeah, as the age... At age four.

Speaker 1

Cool. Can you share an example of a meaningful teaching moment using Lushootseed language? You probably have a lot—most of the classes like that.

Speaker 2

I mean, I would say when I have them repeat after me, or when they ask me something, they just get really happy. They just, they're so so Happy about it. Oh, so I've been doing gift making with the kids for Canoe Journey because 2026 Nisqually is hosting Canoe Journey in about three months. And so I explained to them what Canoe Journey is, that we're hosting, and what gift making is. And so I'm having the little kids paint the rocks, and they're getting really excited because they know It's not theirs to keep. It's, we're making gifts for the people that are going to be here. So they're super excited for that. One kid was like, When is canoe turning? So yeah, just get them excited for that.

Speaker 1

How do you create a classroom environment that reflects cultural values and belonging?

Speaker 2

I bring them show-and-tell because the little kids, you can explain all day. They may not understand. Most, I feel they need like a picture or an example. So I would bring in pictures of me gathering cedar. I am a master basket weaver. And so when I show them pictures of me when I was a little kid and in my regalia, they understand, and they relate because I don't think they realize that I was a kid too. And so, but when they see me as a little kid, Oh, you were my age! I said, Yeah! So they like that. They relate better when I show them pictures or when I bring in my regalia. I have an ancestral regalia that was gifted to me last year, and it's ancestral. So it's old style. So it is a button blanket, and it's more Chehalis style. It's a button blanket, and I have an owl hat made out of it, on a sweet grass hat, and then I still need to have a tunic. And so when I showed them my regalia, they were really like, they, they like it. Yeah.

Speaker 1

So my next category is teaching practices. What strategies do you use to teach Lushootseed to the young children?

Speaker 2

Yeah, so I teach anywhere from four months old all the way up to the elders, and I am not used to- well, I am now. Still, when I first started, I wasn't used to teaching little kids, so I had to really come up with age-appropriate material, and even with the older kids, because the older kids have been in school all day. And so, you know, like the nine-, 10-year-olds, they don't want to do more curriculum. So I try to make it fun, like a scavenger hunt or a hide-and-seek game with the animal plots. And so, like in our animal plot, we have 42 animals. And so we have little stuffies. And so I will hide the stuffies. And they have to come back, or they grab the stuffy. Then they have to tell me in the Lushootseed word, and same with the little kid. I had to come up with it. I had to be really creative and just come up with my own ideas and material. I didn't really have a lot of guidance. I would just Google stuff on materials, and then I would make it into language material. Yeah, so that was challenging, but now I know what they like. They like to play matching games. They really like the colors. They like numbers. So yeah.

Speaker 1

Cool. How do you incorporate movement, song, and land-based learning into language teaching?

Speaker 2

So, I will do... little songs like where is blank so it would be uh chod qui Sweetgrass where is Sweetgrass Alta Disha right here hot slopped beet seed it's good to see you so I'll make little phrases out of a song so that way it's repetitive repetitive repetitive especially for the little kids I

had to do that because a little kid I mean, I guess I could show them flashcards. Still, they're not really going to be, like, interested in it. So I have to be creative.

Speaker 1

So my next category is systems and support. What supports help you to be successful in teaching Lushootseed?

Speaker 2

My colleagues. My colleagues are really supportive, and the Lushootseed community, too, outside in Nisqually is really supportive. Yeah.

Speaker 1

Okay. How can programs better support Lushootseed teaching in language learning?

Speaker 2

Can you repeat your question?

Speaker 1

Yeah. How can our program, the Head Start program, better support Lushootseed teachers in language learning?

Speaker 2

I feel the better support would be really incorporating the language into their everyday practices, not just relying on me. So I'm not sure what that would look like, but yeah, if there were more involvement, I think it would be beneficial to the kids.

Speaker 1

So my next category is family and community. How do families participate in your support for Lushootseed language learning?

Speaker 2

Wow, I don't really know, but I know that some of the parents were asking the teachers how they can support their kid in the language when they don't know how to read it, speak it, or write it. So my colleagues and I came up with a plan to have Months of the Word with the QR code on a language placement. It's not an eating placement, but it's a, we call it the language placement. September all the way through June. So parents can scan the QR code, and it will take them directly to the Nisqually website with the words of the month. And some of them are matched up; some of the words are matched up with Head Start. So, like the colors and some of the other topics that they have in there. So we try to match it up with that. But some of the words, we don't

have words in Lushootseed, so we had to skip. I can't think of some of the words right now. Yeah.

Speaker 1

What role do elders or community members play in language teaching?

Speaker 2

Oh, the elders, they love it. The community really loves the language. Yeah, they always want to know how to say this and how to say that. And they show up; they're consistent. They're consistent when I have my classes once a week; the elders are. And so I don't have a lot, but that's okay. So I have four that are consistent. So, and I would say I just need one.

Speaker 1

Yeah. How can Head Start strengthen connections between home and language learning?

Speaker 2

I feel like they can strengthen language learning when they have an open house or when they do a meet-and-greet. Maybe have me; I've been servicing Head Start for a year and a half. But now I have all eight classes, and so it's just me. I'm hoping in time that I will get help. But for right now, it's just me, you know, when it's time to, or maybe conferences or something like that. I don't know. I don't know how to go about that, but yeah, that's a good question.

Speaker 1

So I'm down to my final section. So there are a couple more questions about reflections and visions. What are your hopes for the future of Lushootseed language among young learners?

Speaker 2

My hopes and vision are that one day this Head Start program will be immersion and only Lushootseed. And it can happen, but it's going to take a lot of work. I don't know if it will be in my lifetime, but I'm hoping one day it's just going to be thriving. And that's all there will be: Lushootseed in this area. And I feel like, yeah, no, I was going to say something else, but no, I'm good.

Speaker 1

What advice would you give to an educator who wants to include Lushootseed in their classroom respectfully?

Speaker 2

To keep an open mind and not to judge the language. I know it's hard, but to keep English and Lushootseed separate. English and the Lushootseed are different. They're so different. I feel there

are no similarities. Maybe similarities in sound, some of the sounds. So, like the letter T, it's going to make the same sound as English. But I mean, that would be the only similarity, but sentence structure is different. And also, I feel like teachers need to be culturally sensitive. Some of the teachers don't know about colonization; they don't know about our histories. And so I feel that should be incorporated somewhere when they first get hired so they understand who we are as an Indigenous community and why people are the way they are sometimes. And so if they have that piece, the true history, then I think they might better understand.

Speaker 1

Just two more questions left. Is there anything else that you would like to share about the work?

Speaker 2

Yes, I love it. It makes me so happy. And three classes weren't getting consistent service, and it was really making me sad. And so now my cup is full, my circle is balanced, my medicine wheel is balanced. And so I love it, and it brings me joy and happiness. And sometimes I'm just on cloud nine; I can be having the worst morning ever, but then I go into the classes, and they just make my day.

Speaker 1

Is there a word, phrase, or story in Lushootseed that you would like to share and what it means to you? Your hutch.

Speaker 2

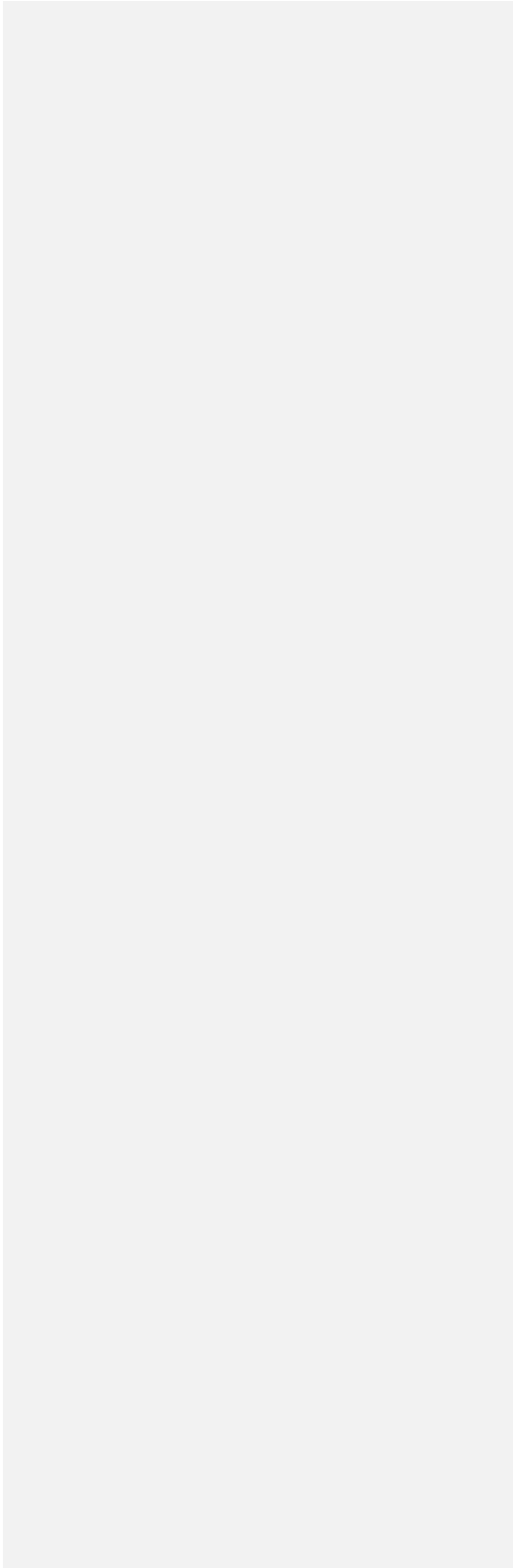
Maybe... I'd like to say huy lulabdubid čəd, and that means see you later. I've always liked that. I'm not really sure why. Or hoyt ššudubid . It's good to see you. I don't really know.

Speaker 1

Thank you. Hawaa in Haida and Gunalcheesh in Tlingit. Gunalcheesh, for interviewing with me. This is an important part of my dissertation. And I'm going to stop recording. Okay.

APPENDIX D

LETTERS OF SUPPORT FROM TRIBES





**Central Council of the Tlingit & Haida
Indian Tribes of Alaska**

907.586.1432 • 800.344.1432
PO Box 25500 • Juneau, Alaska
99802 www.tlingitandHaida.gov

May 1, 2025

Karen Elliott
2705 240th St SW #8
Kent, WA 98032
Karenj10@uw.edu
206-973-9817

Re: Letter of Support – Doctoral Research in Indigenous Literature

Dear Ms. Elliott,

On behalf of the Central Council of the Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, I am pleased to extend our support for your doctoral research investigation focused on Indigenous literature, language, oral traditions, and early education for Native students. We recognize the importance of research that uplifts and preserves our cultural knowledge, and your intent to work closely with our elders and cultural departments is both respectful and commendable.

Tlingit & Haida supports academic inquiry that centers Indigenous voices and perspectives, especially work that aligns with our goals of revitalizing Native languages and advancing culturally grounded education. Your focus on Pre-K to 3rd grade literacy, particularly the intersection of English reading and writing with Indigenous storytelling and language, addresses a vital need in both Tribal communities and public education systems.

We understand your commitment to working collaboratively and respectfully with Tlingit & Haida throughout this research process, and we are confident that your study will contribute meaningfully to the understanding and promotion of Indigenous knowledge systems.

Your primary point of contact at Tlingit & Haida will be Ethan *Daayóosh* Petticrew, Senior Director of Early Education. Please keep Mr. Petticrew informed of any upcoming deadlines, proposed interview timelines, or other key milestones so that we can provide appropriate coordination and support.

We also welcome any additional materials or updates on your research as it progresses. We look forward to staying engaged and to the positive impact your work will have on our youth, culture, and education systems.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Peterson,
President



NISQUALLY INDIAN TRIBE

4820 She-Nah-Num Drive S.E.
Olympia, Washington 98513
360.456.5221 (main)
www.nisqually-nsn.gov

May 23, 2025

University of Washington – Tacoma
School of Education

Re: Karen Elliott - Doctoral Research Investigation
Institutional Review Board (IRB) Letter of Support

The Nisqually Tribal Council is pleased to provide this letter of support for the doctoral research proposal by UW – Tacoma doctoral student Karen Elliott. Ms. Elliott's research inquiry focuses on Indigenous literature of the Nisqually Tribe's language, oral traditions, and culture. Her study examines what school districts and Tribal communities are doing to support Native students from Pre-K to 3rd grade in English reading and writing, along with Indigenous oral and Lushootseed stories. Ms. Elliott intends to consult with the Tribe's culture department to make sure her work reflects the values and representation of Nisqually.

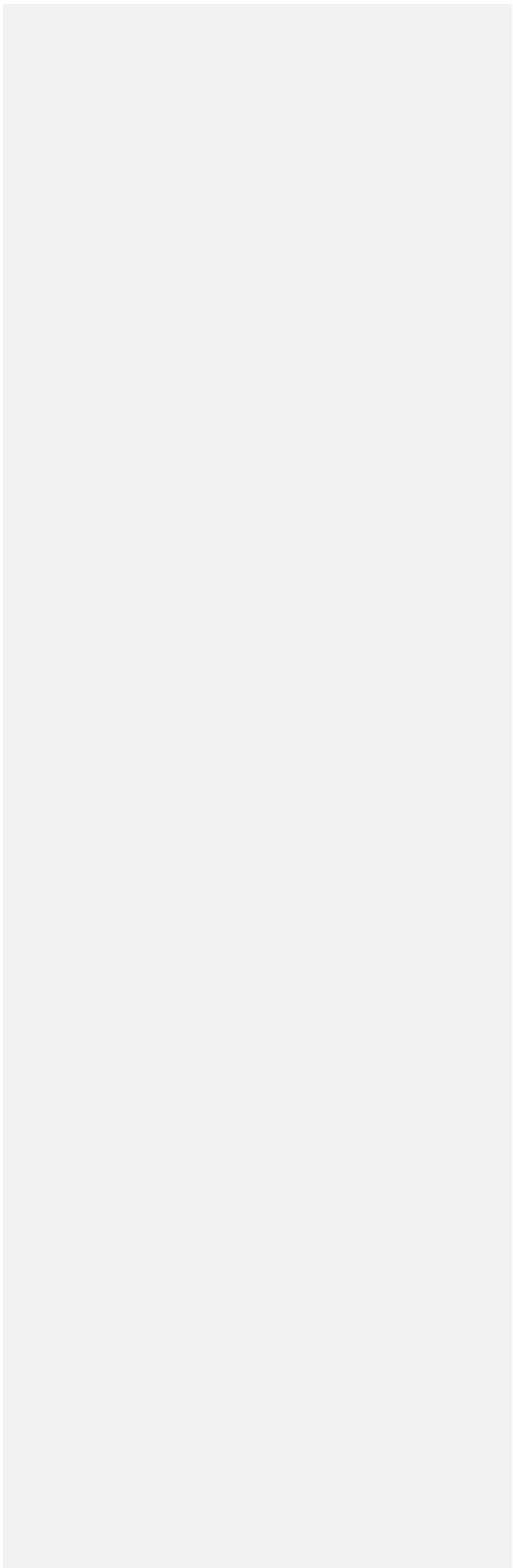
The Nisqually Tribe is fully supportive of Ms. Elliott's research proposal and looks forward to seeing the results of her work.

Sincerely,

E. Ken Choke
Chairman, Nisqually Indian Tribe

APPENDIX E

IRB EXEMPTION NOTIFICATION





DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

February 9, 2026

Dear Karen Elliott:

On 2/9/2026, the University of Washington Human Subjects Division (HSD) reviewed the following application:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Indigenous Literacy: English Reading, Writing, and Indigenous Storytelling in Early Childhood Education
Investigator:	Karen Elliott
IRB ID:	STUDY00024677
Funding:	None

Exempt Status

HSD determined that your proposed activity is human subjects research that qualifies for exempt status (Categories 1 and 2). This determination may or may not be based on the Limited IRB Review process.

- This determination is valid for the duration of your research.
- This means that your research is exempt from the federal human subjects regulations, including the requirement for IRB approval and continuing review.
- Depending on the nature of your study, you may need to obtain other approvals or permissions to conduct your research. For example, you might need to apply for access to data or specimens (e.g., to obtain UW student data). Or you might need to obtain permission from facilities managers to approach possible subjects or conduct research procedures in the facilities (e.g., Seattle School District; the Harborview Emergency Department).
- HSD does not make determinations on behalf of other institutions. If other institutions are involved in the research, they may need to make their own determination or they may decide to be guided by our determination.

Only certain types of changes to exempt research require that you submit a modification in Zipline. For information about what changes require a Modification, refer to the guidance on [Exempt Research](#). If you are unsure if your proposed changes require a modification, contact your [HSD team](#) before preparing the modification.

HSD does not review or approve consent plans and consent materials for exempt research. Researchers are still responsible for providing subjects with information about the research prior to their agreement to participate. Refer to the guidance on [Exempt Research](#) for details about what information should be provided. You may wish to use the optional [Exempt Consent Template](#) as a guide.