

Educational Sovereignty: Creating Community by Ensuring Belonging

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Dissertation in partial fulfillment of the degree Doctor of Educational Leadership

University of Washington, Tacoma

School of Education

March 7th, 2023

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to look at how we can use the education system as a tool to restore tribal identity and create belonging. To successfully see this work through the Lummi Nation, I will have to look at ways to challenge the formalized Western Education System and acknowledge its impacts on identity development. Pre-contact, the Lummi people had education systems in place that ensured the transmission of sacred knowledge, the learning took place within the house, and it was the family's responsibility to ensure the children grew up knowing the family values. The house of learning was broken down due to colonization and forced assimilation, creating a generational gap. The traditional ways of teaching and learning were replaced with foreign knowledge systems. This research asks, "How do we use the education system as a tool to help restore tribal identity and create belonging?" and "What are the internal and external barriers preventing Lummi Nation School from implementing findings?" Through story-sharing sessions, archival research, and a case study focused on the creation story of the Blackhawk Singers, I found a common theme that focused on the importance of mentorship and transitions. Currently, the Lummi Nation follows a model for helping children identify their gifts and ensuring belonging through the Gifted and Talented Program and Transitions Program, available only in specific subjects and for students identified as special education. In this paper, I propose a new model for Gifted and Talented and Transitions to ensure students have equal access to mentorship and transition programs that can help create a sense of belonging and identity development.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to the Lummi Nation.

Hy'shqe (Thank You):

- My children Kashus Good and Kalum Good-My mate Brandon Good for being my inspiration and anchor throughout my dissertation journey.
- My Mother, my Father, and my Grandparents – For being my support system and helping me get to the finish line.
- My late Grandfather Willie Jones Jr for lighting the fire from which my passion stemmed.
- The great tribal leaders that came before me- for paving the way.
- Our Ancestors for their strength and resiliency
- American Indian College Fund Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship & Nyswander Fellowship.
- Northwest Indian College and Coast Salish Institute for teaching me the importance of place-based cultural knowledge.
- George Swanaset Sr., Lawrence Solomon, Dr. Lexie Tom, and Carlene Toby- for sharing their wisdom, knowledge, values, and beliefs.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Long ago, in Coast Salish territory, the people of the Lummi Nation had education systems in place that ensured the transmission of sacred knowledge (Jones et al., 2018). The learning took place within the house, and the family was responsible for ensuring the Coast Salish children grew up knowing the family and tribal values. The elders in the village would observe young people's growth and development from a young age, to see what gifts they presented. When gifts were identified, the young people would devote their whole life to mastering that gift under the guidance of a mentor. Mastering these gifts gave the children a sense of belonging and the foundation on which the community was built. Because of the community's mentorship, no child was ever left behind, and everyone had a place within the community. Our children were taken care of, and our people felt whole.

Pre-contact education systems have now been replaced by Western education systems framed within a colonial context. Today, our community is healing generational trauma by restoring cultural practices within every aspect of life to help children rebuild strong self-identities and bridge the intergenerational gap. Our past Lummi leaders had a vision to help bridge this generation gap by centralizing language, culture, and history within our Lummi Nation School. Lummi must work towards achieving educational sovereignty by regaining control over what, when, and how our children learn. Aguilera-Black Bear (2008) defines Educational Sovereignty as “a people’s right to rebuild its demands to exist and present its gifts to the world... and adamant refusal to dissociate culture, identity, and power from the land (p. 5).

For generations, education systems have been used to enforce colonized teaching and learning methods, resulting in a loss of one’s cultural identity. Lomawaima and McCarty (2002) state that “America’s infatuation with the notion that social change can best be affected through

education, schools have been the logical choice as the institutions charged with the responsibility for Native American cultural genocide (p. 282). The current public education systems within the United States are based on Western knowledge and understanding. They use educational practices to “discredit, degrade, and disrupt students’ linguistic and cultural knowledge systems, systematically erasing Indigenous knowledge and practices from the educational system” (Garcia-Olp, 2018, p.18).

Statement of Problem

Since Time Immemorial, the Lummi people have always had everything they needed to live. Pre-contact learning happened within the house, our people lived off the ecology of their natural environment, and through our community structures, which ensured sustainability from generation to generation. European contact began the destruction of the village structure that existed. Our traditional ways of teaching and learning were replaced with foreign knowledge systems. This historical trauma caused generations of damage to the family structures and the inter-generational imprinting and transfer of sacred knowledge. The children went from receiving intimate educational experiences within their family structures to entering a new educational model that devalued family knowledge, traditions, stories, and language. This created a generational gap in the transmission of these vital components (Jones et al., 2018). Today, the impacts of colonization are “...fueled by issues of power and control, the need to decolonize and Indigenize education stems from the shared experiences of international Indigenous peoples who have endured the dire consequences of colonialism” (Pratt, et al., 2018, p. 1). The sole purpose being to eradicate traditional ways of being and knowing and to reshape Indigenous people in the image of the colonizers—the dominant or invading peoples, who posited themselves as more civilized or powerful (Pratt, et al., 2018, p. 10). This desire for

control continues today as “Eurocentric knowledge systems have been instrumentalized, legislated, and deployed by colonial governments as a mechanism for education, but more insidiously for the assimilation and domination of Indigenous peoples” (Pratt, et al., 2018, p. 10).

Educational leaders must address the continuous K-12 educational inequalities of Indigenous due to the impacts on identity development through formalized Western Education Systems. *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* states, "The problem with colonialism is that it maintains a singular social order by force and law, suppressing the diversity of human worldviews" (Aguilera-Black Bear, 2015, pg. 1). She also stated that this singular worldview created oppression and discrimination within education systems. Addressing educational inequalities is essential and "understanding the differences in worldviews, in turn, gives us a starting point for understanding the paradoxes that colonialism poses for social control (Aguilera-Black Bear, pg. 1). Historically, education has been used as a system to gain control and power. This same system of oppression continues generations later. As stated in *Indigenous Resistance and Racist Schooling on the Borders of Empires: Coast Salish Culture Survival*, "Coast Salish students were still resisting the same oppressive categorizations of identity that their grandparents had struggled within the late twentieth against in the nineteenth century" (Marker, 2009, p. 758). This education system of educational inequalities needs to change. We must acknowledge the oppressive systems our children are forced to learn and implement change. Western educational models continued the colonial eradication legacy of transmitting the official version of ethnic hierarchies and historiographies that defended the present social order and rejected Indigenous discourse on treaty rights (Marker, 2009).

Methodology

Research design

Throughout my education journey, I have been passionate about looking at ways to decolonize the western, colonial models of K-12 education. This stems from wanting to assist and guide Native American children build a strong sense of self-identity. Historically, education has been used as a tool to push assimilation onto our Lummi people. Although historically education has been utilized as a means for oppression. Education can also be a positive tool for decolonization to empower our children. It is important for me to continue to focus on achieving educational sovereignty. The acknowledgement of the inherent rights as sovereign nations, we have the power to decide what is best for our people.

My research will focus on creating community as a stepping-stone to nation-building. More specifically, if each individual within the community could identify their gift, find their place within the community, and contribute back to the community. Then, it would give each individual a sense of belonging to thrive, because each individual would thrive, the community would thrive. Building community is nation-building.

There is a difference between my definition of community when I first started on this educational journey and my definition of community that I have now. I have the work of Gregory Cajete to thank for this. In his work, he speaks of community as rebuilding what once was. I often refer to this as a sort of remembering or awakening of the prehistoric way of belonging. Cajete states that community is both the medium and message, with this goal "...to restore both community and individual well-being as the foundation for a sustainable future" (Cajete, 2015, p. xv).

To make the research manageable with the desired outcome of answering my research questions and researching something that will be meaningful to the Lummi Nation, I decided to look at, "How do we use the education system as a tool to help restore tribal identity and create belonging?" and "What are the internal and external barriers that are preventing Lummi Nation School from the implementation of findings?"

Participants were asked to join the study based on their critical roles in Indigenous mentorship, leadership, and education. My target population includes master carvers, master weavers, language speakers, canoe skippers, knowledge keepers, and education leaders within Coast Salish Territory. I will have an insider position within my research, meaning I will have a direct connection to the Lummi community. As an insider within the community, recruitment into the study will be accomplished through direct interpersonal communication. I used a snowball sampling approach as an adaptive measure to incorporate additional participants based on recommendations. Snowball sampling is defined as "a sampling method used by researchers to generate a pool of participants for a research study through referrals made by individuals who share a particular characteristic of research interest with the target population" (Frey, 2018, p. 2).

Lummi Nation School: *A Blackhawk Story*

Education has always been important to the Lummi people. When the boarding school era took place, the Lummi people no longer wanted their children to be taken away and sent off to boarding school. In response, the Lummi Nation started their own school on their reservation, known today as the Lummi Day School. The Lummi Day School was the beginning of the *cradle-to-grave education model*. The cradle-to-grave education model stems from our Lummi values and belief that our people are learning from the day they enter this earth until the moment they cross over to the other side. The Lummi Nation used this and wanted to provide educational

opportunities for their children to learn within the reservation boundaries from the day they are born until the moment they cross over to the other side.

The idea behind the Lummi Day school was that children would no longer be sent away to attend boarding schools. They could attend school during the day and come home to be with their family. The purpose of this was to attempt to continue the intimate education and learning experiences they received while at home in hopes of remaining connected to their culture.

I was fortunate enough to read an old interview of my Great-Grandmother Eva Kinley in the book *Lummi Elders Speak* where she shared her experiences with boarding schools:

"When I was little I went to Tulalip School. My brothers and sisters went to Tulalip school, my mother and father went to Lummi Day School. For many years I thought I was the only one in my family who knew how to read but I was wrong, my mother knew how to read too. I went to Tulalip School in 1914, then I went to Kuper Island Catholic school in Canada (Nugent, 1982). I do remember having to get up early and clean. I didn't get to see any of my brothers and sisters that were there, but one night I seen my sister Rose, she told me not to talk loud. My sister Rose asked me what I learned. I told her I learned about the letter "a" . It's a circle with a tail on it. She told me "Don't try and learn too hard, you'll forget them, and then you'll have to learn again, it's confusing." (Nugent, 1982).

That last sentence is something that has always resonated with me. I felt that her sister Rose didn't want my Great-Grandmother to "learn too hard" because what they were learning wasn't meant for them. Realizing when she got home she would have to focus on relearning her own cultural ways and forget the Catholic beliefs that were forced upon her.

The tribe built the first Lummi Day School in 1910, but it was not open very long as the building was flooded shortly afterward (Nugent, 1982). When Lummi no longer had access to a day school on their reservation, and parents no longer wanted to send their children away to federal boarding schools, parents resorted to the local public-school system. It seemed as though local public school would lighten parents' worries when it came to sending their children to school. Parents figured their children could go to school, get an education, and then come to the reservation and remain intact in the family system. Little did we know the long-lasting impact the colonized education system would have on Native American students, especially when racism and discrimination against the local Lummi tribal members was common.

The children of the Lummi Nation attended a local public school in the neighboring city of Ferndale, Washington. Attending public school during the fishing wars created a complex and divided school filled with cultural conflict. A scholar named Michael Marker wrote a dissertation about Lummi Stories from High School, which shared the conditions of schooling for Lummi students at Ferndale High School and how the hostility, fueled by Native American fishing rights, impacted them. These students' stories are unique and present many themes of Indian education: language problems, identity issues, and the mixture of political and cultural conflicts between whites and Indians [Native American] concerning ways of seeing the world (Marker, 1995). The stories the students shared displayed the struggle that Lummi students faced to maintain their identity in the face of a white community and school system attempting to assimilate them (Marker, 1995).

It was because of this cultural barricade that Lummi students were encountering at Ferndale School District that Lummi moved its focus to fight for a tribal school on the Lummi

Nation reservation. They went to Washington D.C. and lobbied for the funds to start a tribal school of their own. These past leaders had a vision, a dream of what they wanted for the children.

The first year of the Lummi Tribal School started with only five students. My Grandfather shared a story with me about how he asked those five students what they felt they needed to make this school feel like their own. On the first day of school, he went through a visioning process with them and asked the students what their vision was for their new school. They had responded by stating they wanted to get more students involved so they could have a sports team, they wanted jackets that had their new school logo on the back, and they wanted their school logo to be the Lummi Blackhawks. It took me a long time to realize that it was more than just jackets and a school logo to them. But what the jackets really represented was the students searching for a sense of belonging. They wanted someone to believe in them, listen to their wishes, and help them understand they were important. Since beginning my education journey, it has become clear that my grandfather had a vision for the Lummi Nation School and what it should represent. That was to continue giving children a sense of belonging. Just as my grandfather served as a mentor and advocate for those five students, we must continue to find the tools needed to help children build a strong self-identity, create community, and provide mentorship opportunities to help children create a strong sense of belonging.

My late Grandpa, Willie Jones Sr., used to talk about the visioning process and how it was important because he knew our people were visionaries. Not only was he a tribal leader he was an advocate for education and played a huge part in the vision process for Lummi Nation School. Although he is not here physically today, his stories remain with me, and I will now

share them with you to help gain clarity regarding how we have we have come to understand the original vision of Lummi Nation School.

Merisa: Grandpa, I was wondering if you could help me with a homework assignment do you have time to sit and talk with me? I really could use some help, I feel I've hit a roadblock in my project.

Grandpa: Yes... for you I always have time.

Merisa: Grandpa, Can you tell me the story again of how the Lummi Nation School came to be?

Grandpa: Are you sure you have time Granddaughter?

Merisa: Yes Grandpa I always have time for your stories.

Grandpa: When I was on tribal council long ago, I went to a conference in San Diego and attended a workshop that was focused on a vision process. It caught my attention and focus because our people were visionaries.

Merisa: What do you mean by visioning process Grandpa?

Grandpa: So, let's say you wanted to do a vision process for the ideal vision for education, there is two circle... one is called the "now" circle and other is called the "past". The circles include what is going on now and what we can for the future, but it also includes feelings. And the arrow in between, what do we have to get there. One day I realized there was something missing, it was a past circle, understanding that we can't know where we are going until we understand where we have been. The past circles were mostly filled with hurt.... This was the time of boarding schools. I then added another circle, which was pre contract, we had to guess what that was because I wasn't here. I studied them circles, I could see why were are having problems. We were focused on

different problems.

Merisa: How does the visioning process help you come up with solutions for the future?

Grandpa: When you look at them four circles, all the things that have happened to us.

Part of our problem is we are looking at our recent “past” circle and almost claiming them as our roots, our roots go back to pre-contact. We have to go back to our roots, that is what we need to do. I think that is the only way we are going to reach our visions. Go back to who we are,

Merisa: Grandpa how did the Lummi Nation School get started?

Grandpa: It was always my passion to fight for education for our youth. I wanted a whole education system on the reservation. Your Grandma told me go out and do something, look at all these children on the streets not doing anything. I went to Portland and asked them what it would take to get a high school. They gave us a small amount of money to work with at first, but I was just thankful to get any. I rounded up a handful of students and go the Lummi Nation High School started up.

Grandpa: When school first started, I sat with those handful of students and I used that visioning process for those students, their vision was they wanted to fix the mud hole on campus. They wanted to get a bike rack, and third thing was school jackets. They were told no by the principal, and I had to fight for them, because I knew it wasn't about the jacket it was about recognition and belonging. The fourth being they wanted a building for a new school.

Continuing The Vision: Retelling the Stories of Our Old People

When I continued my education journey by working toward my master's degree, I was interested in identifying how we help children build strong self-identities. I worked on a group

capstone project with Brandon Morris, “Telem’ichten” of the Lummi Nation, and Christina Grendon “Ste wat alth” of the Sauk Suiattle Tribe. Our work started by using the Honorable House of Learning framework to help guide us. Understanding that pre-contact, we had education systems in place that ensured the transmission of sacred knowledge (Jones et al., 2018), the learning took place within the house, and it was the family’s responsibility to ensure the children grew up knowing the family values (Jones et al., 2018).

The house of learning had been broken down due to the impacts of colonization, creating a generational gap for children. We wanted to take the Honorable House of Learning framework and incorporate it within our Lummi Nation School (LNS) to ensure the children received the foundation knowledge needed to form a strong self-identity. We felt that to access this private knowledge, we must incorporate culture, language, and history at LNS. When I was younger, I recall having a conversation with my grandmother and she explained to me that culture is not a jacket you put on and take off, and it must be inter-woven within everything you do.

Our research question stemmed from wanting to carry out the work of our old people. We knew the past leaders had a vision for the LNS, and we, as researchers, needed a complete understanding of our starting point. To help guide our research, we used my late Grandfather’s visioning philosophy. My Grandfather shared a story with me of how he learned about the visioning process and what the vision process stood for, *“We have to go back to our roots, and that is what we need to do. I think that is the only way we are going to reach our visions.”*

Go back to who we are. The words ‘go back to who you are’ resonated with me. Our starting point for our research project was asking the question “What was the original vision for Lummi Nation School?” The past leaders who fought to have a tribal school had a vision in place, and we felt it was not our place to recreate what already existed (Jones et al., 2018).

Defining the original vision was important to me because of my grandfather's role in ensuring Lummi children had their tribal school. He saw firsthand the number of children in the community struggling within the public-school education system. He travelled to Washington, D.C., and fought to secure educational funding to support the Lummi Nation having our own tribal school. His goal was for the community to educate the children without external barriers. His goal was to leave behind the historical trauma of our past.

The first year of the Lummi Tribal School started with only five students. My Grandfather shared a story with me about how he asked those five students what they felt they needed to make this school feel like their own. On the first day of school, he went through his visioning process and asked the students what their vision was. They responded by expressing that they wanted to get more students involved to have a sports team, they wanted jackets that had their new school logo on the back and wanted their school logo to be the Lummi Blackhawks.

We saw eight recurring themes through archival research and story-sharing sessions, which we presented as balances and imbalances. The most apparent theme that appeared was belonging. Other themes included Family and Community, Pedagogy, Culture, Self-Determination, Accessibility, Colonization, and Two-Worlds.

1. Family and Community (Balance): Within archival data, we found an education plan from the 1970s that stated the need for a family-centered education system. There were references to community involvement and being reminded of the responsibility of the community as a whole. There was also a concept of intergenerational learning, which includes the whole family structure being involved.

2. Pedagogy (Balance): Within archival data, we found a strong desire to teach, organize, and learn in a Lummi style. Pedagogy represents a reclaiming of the classroom and an intergenerational learning system.
3. Culture (Balance): Within archival data, a statement that the goal of Lummi education was to incorporate Lummi language, beliefs, and values.
4. Self-Determination (Balance): Data calls for action to determine the standards and curriculum of education in our community.
5. Accessibility (Imbalance): Past leaders wanted an education system for children on the reservation. They wanted to develop and support educational programs that helped children be prepared for life problems and opportunities. As stated in Lummi Indian Business Council resolution 90–20 “All Lummi students will be provided with a safe, caring, stimulation, positive learning environment that includes the proper space.”
6. Colonization (Imbalance): Acknowledging a conflict between traditional and contemporary values when attending the public school system led to many factors, such as low attendance, racial conflict, and high dropout rates. Past leaders used colonization as a motivation to create a tribal school on the reservation where they could incorporate tribal values in hope of increasing attendance, ending racial conflict, and lowering the high dropout rate.
7. Two-Worlds (Imbalance): The Lummi children were having to learn and adapt to different learning styles that conflict with tribal beliefs and values.

We categorized these seven themes into balances and imbalances. The balances were areas that we believed would work towards achieving belonging at LNS. The imbalances were

Pre-Colonial Honorable House of Learning Framework

Pre-contact, we had education systems that ensured the transmission of sacred family knowledge (Jones et al., 2018). The learning took place within the house, and the family was responsible for ensuring the children grew up learning the family values, structures, and beliefs. Aunties, Uncles, Grandmothers, and Grandfathers played the roles of teachers. The learning was hands on, and the education took place by first observing and then doing. There was relational accountability and understanding that each member of the longhouse played a role in ensuring the children grew up knowing the family teachings, values, and beliefs. Dr. Lexie Tom (2018) talked about this in her dissertation “*An indigenous teacher preparation framework*” which described the Honorable House of Learning Framework this way, “These very important teachings were passed to the future generations in the longhouses. When we describe the longhouse in any modern interpretation, it is from this context which we create these frameworks. The honorable house of learning is where these sacred teachings were passed down to future generations. This transference of knowledge was important to the survival of our people, of our culture” (p. 8).

Self-Reflection as Research

When I first entered my education journey, it stemmed from being passionate about finding a way to heal our people. I saw first-hand the many people in my community suffering from addiction. I wanted to know as a community what we could do to help our people heal. At first, I thought of what I would now call surface-level solutions to an iceberg of a problem. Through the mentorship of my capstone faculty, I was able to see that the answers I was suggesting would not help me get to the root of the issues of addiction. I began to think of what came first, prevention or rehabilitation. I began to look at what youth prevention means. What

does youth prevention look like? Is it a program after school? Is it participating in a dance group? Is it going to youth basketball tournaments? The Lummi Nation has a large focus on youth prevention, and by youth prevention, I mean providing youth with services, programs, and opportunities that are aimed at reducing the likelihood of them turning to risk factors such as drugs, alcohol, and violence. It has been proven that “Native American youth living on or near reservations to a national sample of American youth found that Native American youth report substantially higher use of alcohol, marijuana, cigarettes, and other illicit drugs” (NIDA, 2018, p.1).

I thought of why youth turn to drugs—many come from broken homes due to drug and alcohol abuse. I began to make observations about the relationship between helping children and re-building a strong cultural identity as a form of youth support. If a child knows who they are, where they come from, their family values, tribal values, and tribal language, they are less likely to be lead down the path of substance abuse because they are grounded in their tribal identity.

I was fortunate to have Dr. Cornel Pewewardy as an instructor in my education journey, and he shared a "Drowning Parable" with our class.

Once upon a time a woman, strolling along a riverbank, hears a cry for help and seeing a drowning person rescues him. She no sooner finishes administering artificial respiration when another person cries out loud which also requires another rescue from the river.

Again, she has only just helped the second person when a third call for help is heard.

After a number of rescues, she begins to realize that she is pulling some people out of the river more than once. By this time, the rescuer is exhausted and resentful, feeling that if people are stupid or careless enough to keep landing in the river, they can rescue themselves. She is too annoyed, tired, and frustrated to look around her. Shortly after,

another woman walking along the river hears the cries for help and begins rescuing people. She, however, wonders why so many people are drowning in this river. Looking around her, she sees a hill where something seems to be pushing people off into the river. Realizing this as the source of the drowning problem, she is faced with a difficult dilemma: If she rushes uphill, people presently in the river will drown; if she stays at the river pulling them out, more people will be pushed in. What can she do? (Derman-Sparks et al., 1997, p.2)

I realized this was the same question I was asking myself when reflecting on prevention versus rehabilitation. Realizing that building a strong self-identity happens within the family, what happens when the family structure is broken due to the impacts of colonization and inter-generational trauma? Do we start with rebuilding strong parents (helping people downriver), or do we have to adjust our priorities (uphill) and focus on building strong children with strong self-identities who build a strong, healthy family? I concluded that if we ever want to bridge the generation gap, we must start with the youth by helping them build a strong self-identity.

As I began to think about my journey to finding my place and sense of belonging, I reflected on how I found my gifts and the opportunities to make contributions to the community. I credit everything I am learning to those who took the time to share stories. Where would I be if I did not have a Grandfather who taught me the importance of believing, and a Grandmother who taught me the importance of knowing who you are and where you come from. What would happen if I did not learn the teaching of the canoe and didn't learn that it is possible to navigate rough waters?

I think of the children in the community that may be less fortunate than I am. I was blessed to have mentors in my life, and I want all our children to have that same support in their

lives. To build a strong, culturally viable, and sustainable community, we must work to guarantee the transmission of sacred knowledge. The pre-contact house of learning framework needs to be implemented within our K-12 systems so we as a community can ensure when the children leave the LNS they have a solid foundation of who they are, where they want to be, and how they are going to get there.

As mentioned, I acknowledge much of the work shared in this section learned on my personal journey because someone took the time to share of piece of themselves with me. This is an important attribute of being and belonging to a community and our capacity to share place-based knowledge. You never know when the words you share may have an ever-lasting impact on the future.

Chapter Two: A Literature Review

For my research, I looked at what is currently in the literature about achieving educational sovereignty. I consider this a two-part literature review as the first section was finding research as it related to educational sovereignty and the second part was narrowing my topic down further by picking the themes that stemmed from education sovereignty and researching them further. To identify literature for first part of my review, I used current research from other Indigenous scholars regarding issues impacting educational sovereignty. It was from my literature review that I was able to identify eight reoccurring themes. The eight main themes that stemmed from the literature included *Educational Sovereignty, Teacher Preparation, State Standards, Evaluation, Education Leadership, Indigenous Leadership, Implementing Change, and Community*. It was from there that I took a look at what was already being done within the Lummi Nation as it pertained to these eight themes. I considered where Lummi Nation was already making headway as it pertained to achieving educational sovereignty and what areas could the nation benefit from further research. I was aware that members of the Lummi Nation were already advancing in the areas of teacher preparation, State-Standard, and Evaluation, which lead to my dissertation focus and part II literature review of *Community*.

Teacher Preparation

Through literature, many scholars stressed the importance of teacher preparation. To introduce language, history, and culture into the education system, we need to have teachers capable of doing so. Many people do not understand teachers' influence on a student's development throughout their thirteen years of formal schooling. Many of these "...researchers have argued that teachers' epistemological beliefs influence teaching practices" (Olafson et al.,

2010, p. 244). There were two pieces of literature that I pulled from. One is about challenging collegiate schools of education, and the other is a teacher preparation framework.

I always enjoy reading the work of Dr. Eve Tuck, as she is an educational activist who speaks very passionately about her area of interest. In the book titled *Who Decides Who Becomes a Teacher? Schools of Education as Sites of Resistance*, the authors focus on researching who decides who becomes a teacher. She stated that the "School of Education as a whole has not pushed back against neoliberal policies which have become so typical in K-12 schooling" Nor have they engaged in resistance in how these policies influence teacher education" (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2019, p. 3). In the literature, Tuck expresses that she steers away from neoliberalism that does not also attend to settler colonialism, meaning the two must go hand in hand. Tuck also expresses the "pathway to reclaiming education in ways that are consistent with long-held critiques of neoliberal reform" (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2019, p. 4). The purpose of this literature is addressing the questions "what is the purpose of policy in teacher education? and whose interests are served?" (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2019, p. 4)

Within this textbook, the two authors talk about Critical Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogies (CSR/P), which is a pedagogical framework that "promotes education experiences rooted in sovereignty issues, Indigenous languages, and community-based accountability" (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2019, p. 198)—stating that these "alternative imaginings of teacher performance are beacons that can light paths towards justice" (p. 198).

The second piece of literature comes from the literature of Dr. Lexie Tom and titled *A Teacher Preparation Framework* (2018). It focuses on asking the question, "what do instructors need to know to teach at the Northwest Indian College, and how can we recreate an Indigenous method for teaching and learning in a modern institution"? She uses the longhouse model and

talks about a story shared with her by a Tsartlip Elder. Tom shared about how he learned from his Grandparents, and they would stop and ask him to repeat what he had learned from their lesson in the longhouse - if he could not articulate what he had learned, they would go back and start over. This is a process of reflection, and he is not to move on to the next lesson until the previous one has been fully understood.

There are two different frameworks that Dr. Lexie Tom shares: the teaching and learning framework and the teacher's preparation framework. Teaching and learning aims to increase student success by building faculty capacity in teaching and learning at NWIC (Tom, 2018). As stated by Dr. Lexie Tom, "self-reflection became a key component to this work, asking faculty questions such as who am I? What society are we preparing students for? What is my role in self-determination for NWIC students?" (Tom, 2018, p. 121). In summary, Dr. Tom's teacher preparation framework is a sequence of lessons that build on top of each other. These steps include the following action:

- Employee Orientation
- History of NWIC
- Handbook, Strategic Plan, Core Themes, Values, Personnel Policy
- Curriculum Development
- Canvas Training
- Institution, Program, Course outcomes, Curriculum Map
- How do you measure learning?
- NWIC Mission- What does self-determination mean, What does it mean to tribal people, and how do I support this mission?
- Observation and role in learning

- Critical Thinking
- How have I been impacted by colonization - Trauma training
- We can't ask our students to do what we don't know- there is always room for growth.
Who am I? How does my family lineage define who I am?
- Indigenous Governance Model

State Standards

Washington State Senator John McCoy's work on Chapter 290, Laws of 2018, gives State/Tribal Compact Schools the ability to implement culturally relevant curriculum and assessments. This was passed by Legislators in 2018 and approved to be a five-year pilot program. It is unfortunate, but as far as I have seen, there are no schools working toward implementing this. Lummi Nation School has created the language and culture standards for grades K-12, which could align with this. Washington State Chapter 290, Laws of 2018 states that "replacing, to the maximum extent permitted by state and federal law, statewide student assessments with locally developed assessments that are culturally relevant, based on community standards, and aligned with the Washington state learning standards" (65th Legislature, 2018). It leaves me to wonder, when can something be culturally relevant and in alignment with the Washington State learning standards?

Evaluation

One theme that emerged while conducting my literature review was evaluations, and I wondered: how do we evaluate success? In the article "Reframing evaluation: Defining an Indigenous evaluation framework" LaFrance focuses on explaining an effort to develop an Indigenous framework that synthesizes an Indigenous way of knowing and Western evaluation practice (2008, p. 1). The goal of this specific research project was to develop an evaluation

process that accommodated and valued different "ways of knowing" within an Indigenous epistemology (LaFrance, 2008, p. 1). An important section in this research talks about taking ownership of defining success from the perspective of the community's values and aspirations. From an Indigenous point of view, the evaluator must have an understanding of the self-determination that fuels the goals and aspirations of Indian communities to preserve, promote, and restore their culture (LaFrance, 2008, p. 13). This is important because currently, all the tribal schools in the state must follow standards that are set by Washington State. They are told what children must successfully complete and are evaluated from a framework that is based on Western ways of knowing and understanding.

Education Leadership

In *Education Leadership*, three authors speak of the importance of educational leadership. The first author is Cajete, who states that leadership and developing community leaders are essential pedagogy aims in an Indigenous community" (Cajete, 2015, p. 145). Expressing that "Indigenous education cares about training people for leadership-because good leadership is a matter of survival -physical, social, cultural, and spiritual" (Cajete, 2015, p.145). When it comes to "developing a basic conceptual framework for Indigenous community leadership, it is important that the relationship of Indigenous education to establishing and maintaining individual and community wholeness also be seriously considered" (Cajete, 2015, p.145). In a book titled *Voice of resistance and renewal: Indigenous leadership in education* by Aguilera-Blackbear and Tippeconnic, the authors address the theoretical foundations of Indigenous leadership within community context and the knowledge and pedagogy for preparing leaders for decolonizing education (Aguilera-Blackbear & Tippeconnic, 2015). They state that educators must have sufficient intellectual capital of Indigenous knowledge and leadership skills

to facilitate the attainment of self-determination and educational sovereignty (Aguilera-Blackbear & Tippeconnic, 2015). They concluded by emphasizing that community-based leadership is fundamental to achieving self-determination in education (Aguilera-Blackbear & Tippeconnic, 2015).

My last literature review for education leadership was the work of Dr. Pewewardy (2019) titled *Restorative education, reconciliation, and healing: Indigenous perspectives on decolonizing leadership education*. Dr. Pewewardy argued that reconciliation could not be achieved ". . . without racial healing and risked being temporary unless sustained through transformative actions; this transformation requires that we do things differently and that power dynamics shift. For leadership educators, this means developing the capacity to actualize a new paradigm" (Cross et al., 2019, p. 107). When it comes to reconciliation, he states that "such a shift in higher education will be impossible so long as the dominant culture fails to recognize that its worldview and resulting systems and practices are designed to dominate and deculturize those who are different" (Cross et al., 2019, p. 105).

Indigenous Leadership

This article focuses on the perspective of transformational teaching and learning in the context of community. As stated by Cajete, "Indigenous forms of traditional education within the context of the tribal community were a holistic and integrated process whose cumulative effects on leaders produced very deep learning and commitment to communal and cultural values in such a way as to produce exceptional leaders (Cajete, 2016, p. 365). I asked myself, what does community mean? Cajete defines community as "the context in which the American Indian person comes to know the nature of the relationship, responsibility, and participation in the

lifeways of one's people" (Cajete, 2016, p. 366). Understanding community plays a huge role in the decolonization of education, as stated by Cajete:

Community is also the context in which the "affective" dimension of education unfolds. It is the "place" where one comes to know what it is to be related. It is the place of sharing life through everyday acts, through song, dance, story, and celebration. It is the place of teaching, learning, making art, and sharing thoughts, feelings, joy, and grief. It is the place for feeling and being "connected." The community is the place where each person can, metaphorically speaking, "become complete" and express the fullness of their life, it is that place that Indian people talk about." (Cajete, 2016, p. 366)

I felt that including the whole quote was important because it was this quote that made me interested in wanting to research more about what it means to be whole or complete. "Indigenous education helped each person to "find life" and thereby realize a level of completeness in their life. This was done with the understanding that each individual would find the right one for them in their own time" (Cajete, 2016, p. 372). This idea of people becoming complete in their own time and at their own pace was something that I have also been interested in continuing to research.

Implementing Change

The third theme I wanted that emerged about finding ways to implement meaningful change. In the article by Nicole Bowman (2020) titled, "Nation-to-nation in evaluation: Utilizing an Indigenous evaluation model to frame systems and government evaluations," the researcher presented a model for implementing change. The problem was presented as understanding that "existing culturally responsive systems literature lacks a comprehensive systems-oriented evaluation model to address the unique legal and political components regarding sovereign

Tribal Nations governments” (Bowman, 2020, p. 102). As stated by Bowman, "Western theorists and evaluation practitioners continue to neglect Tribal Governments and sovereign First Nations communities in systems or governance evaluations” (Bowman, 2020, p. 102). The solution to this is "Blending systems theory and thinking, critical systems theory, Tribal Critical Theory (TCT), and Indigenous Evaluation (IE) can begin to conceptualize how Tribal sovereignty can be raised to a systems level, thus influencing evaluation policy and evidence-based practice through Tribal/First Nation and public government initiatives” (Bowman, 2020, p.105). I appreciated learning from this article because it "critically asks us to consider how sovereignty is one critical lever for creating transformative change in policy, practice, and evaluation” (Bowman, 2020, p. 110).

In the article "Re-visioning action: Participatory action research and Indigenous theories of change," By Eve Tuck (2018) the research focused on looking at how we make an effective change when conducting research. I was really drawn to this specific article because often while conducting research, there is a problem that is identified, but how do we as Indigenous researchers implement effective change? In Eve Tuck's research, she focused on two different research projects that she conducted about youth and education systems. Her problem statement focuses on "patterns in dysfunctional power relationships across many youth representing many schools" (Tuck, 2009, p. 52). Her focus on creating change is "'does change happen like the turn of a new page?" Each requires a different, even opposite, strategy of action" (Tuck, 2009, p. 49). The vantage points she used through an Indigenous framework were sovereignty, contention, balance, and relationships. Her solution being re-visioning change understanding that the "changes that we wanted to see were deeper and more systematic and ideological than those bodies could inform." I feel this article can be helpful to my research because it makes us look at

change through our own theoretical framework. She was allowing us to come up with solutions that allow us to make effective changes within Indigenous communities.

Educational Sovereignty

The last and final theme that surfaced during my literature review was about achieving educational sovereignty. The literature that I analyzed emphasized the importance of place, understanding that "Aboriginal people have an identity that is profoundly connected to a sense of place; they have an interpretation of the history and meaning of that place that distinguishes them from all other ethnic minorities. For Indian people "location" is always a real place" (Marker, 2000, p. 412). One key component to achieving educational sovereignty is acknowledging the community's tribal sovereignty. There are many educational issues facing Native American communities when it comes to tribal sovereignty, particularly the current relationship tribes have with government entities and the impacts it has on achieving educational sovereignty (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Education systems "fail to integrate an understanding of the history of Indigenous schooling, fail to acknowledge the importance of culturally responsive schooling, and fail to center the role of tribal governments as sovereign leaders" (Castagno et al., 2016, p. 231). One issue that tribal communities face is restrictions put on them by the state and federal governments. Although tribes have their own tribal school, they are still required to adhere to state standards. The government systems still treat tribal communities as if they are in a dependent domestic relationship, meaning "although tribes were "distinct independent political communities, they remained subject to the paternalistic powers of the United States" (Milwaukee Public Museum, 2022). As a part of asserting their educational sovereignty, tribes were given the option to create charter schools with the hope being "individual charter schools themselves should determine student academic outcomes to match their educational objectives"(Castagno et

al., 2016, p. 231). Instead of charter schools achieving educational sovereignty, it was soon found out that "over time, standards-based reform engrossed the academic operations of charter schools by using accountability pressures to shift the core mission of all charter schools to teaching the academic standards"(Castagno et al., 2016, p. 231). The solution is to achieve educational sovereignty through breaking the barrier of control which is a relationship with the federal government that needs to be corrected. As stated, "In this article, we argue that tribal sovereignty must include education sovereignty. Regardless of whether schools operate on or off tribal lands, in the same way, that schools are accountable to state and federal governments, so too are they accountable to the Native American nations whose children they serve" (McCarty & Lee, p. 102).

Community

The thought of achieving educational sovereignty by rebuilding everyone within the community by helping them find their "gift" was an approach that Cajete shared in his writing. He stated that community is both the medium and message, with this goal being "to restore both community and individual well-being as the foundation for a sustainable future" (2015, p. xv).

In his book, he talked about educating for wholeness. He was the first author that I read who talked about the same solution as I had: helping children build a strong identity so that they would feel whole and complete. He created an eight-step framework called the Indigenous Stages of Development Learning. He wrote that the "right" education brings changes that, in a time, profoundly transform oneself (2015, p. 39). He understood that we need to revive community education and community well-being as a method of revitalization (2015). It was from this literature that my dissertation theme of *Achieving Educational Sovereignty by Creating Community* was born.

Literature Review Part II

After identifying the eight themes above, I decided to focus my research specifically on achieving education sovereignty by rebuilding the community. For my research, I wanted to look at what is currently in the literature pertaining to the themes identified from my story-sharing sessions. To identify literature for this review, I used current research from other Indigenous scholars using keyword searches which included Indigenous Mentorship, Indigenous Community, Identity Development (Belonging), and Transitions.

Community

As stated above, a major theme of literature as it pertains to educational sovereignty was community. The way that community helps rebuild a nation is explained in Cajete's work: "Indigenous communities can reinvent themselves in positive healthy ways by drawing on two sources: our historical traditions of community and positive, contemporary methods of community building." (Cajete, 2015, preface xv). There is a relational accounting mentality that has been lost within our community, understanding that it is our sacred obligation to ensure the success of the next generation. As Cajete stated, "the vision motivating and the belief system guiding this inquiry revolve around the premise that Indigenous community is based on relational thinking." (Cajete, 2015, preface xv). Understanding that is going to take each one of us doing our part to "revive community education and community building as a method of revitalization". (Cajete, 2015, preface xv).

Mentorship

The importance of mentorship was along the lines of our community revitalization or in other words our relational accountability to ensure belonging. Thinking of how to do bring back the thinking of "this is my sacred obligation" vs. the thinking of "every man for himself". One

source of literature stated, “Mentorship plays a role in cultures around the world. Although it is woven into the traditional values of many Indigenous peoples, in many communities, its use has been disrupted by colonialism” (Burke & MacDonald, 2021, p. 3). The authors also stated that

. . . reclaiming the practice of mentorship has been identified as one way for Indigenous peoples to reconnect to their cultures and identities” (Burke & MacDonald, 2021, p. 3). The benefits of mentorship arguably include trickle-down effects to younger generations within communities: a shared understanding of cultural issues helping to facilitate access to mainstream resources, expanded social support networks, emotional support, learning how to navigate institutional structures and politics, and helping to connect to the campus community and to receive academic and emotional support and assistance in the development of goals. (Burke & MacDonald, 2021, p. 4)

Literature also indicates that there are benefits for Indigenous mentors participating in mentorship programs. These benefits include the opportunity to explore their own cultural identities, feel connected to the community, expand networks of social support, create new partnerships among organizations, and develop skills. (Burke & MacDonald, 2021)

(Pre-Contact) The elders in the community would watch the children from a young age to help identify their gifts. Once the gifts were identified, the children were paired with a mentor that helped master that gift. Once their gift was mastered, they were then able to contribute back to the community (Personal Communication, Tom, 2023). In the book, *What was said to me: The life of Sti'tum'atul'wut, a Cowichan Woman* by Ruby Peters, she stated:

Life is hard, but helping young people get into a goal is the most important thing, to guide them, to encourage. You don't tell them they are dumb; you don't tell them they are stupid. You say “Let's try it this way, let's try it another way; maybe you'll

understand it this way. And that always helps when you are guiding people: Show them that they can help themselves, they can do something for themselves, that they can try harder. It's hard, but it pays off (Peters, 2021, p.3).

All the sources stated that the need for mentors was important, and this is something we have been doing since pre-contact.

Transitions

Within community, there was a theme that emerged which was understanding transition. What does transition mean in current times, what does transition mean pre-contact, and who is responsible for ensuring a transition has been made? In the book by Peters, she talks about pre-contact ceremonies that took place when a person was transitioning from one stage to the next. These ceremonies include memorials, change of life, adoption, funeral, widow, and orphans. (Peters, 2021, p. 17). Peters shared,

There are many things in life that change a person. For the young people to help themselves by going to Elders and asking what they can do to help themselves when they become orphans or lose a mate. It is also the same when we are growing up. What you are taught, the examples that are set upon the children, the work that they do, the work the parents do, what they see. (Peters, 2021, p.18)

One thing to note is that pre-contact transitioning from one stage of life to the next was sacred to our people. We know this because we had ceremonies that took place to ensure the transition took place.

Other literature discussed the transition as “the exploration of self, and relationships to inner and outer entities, requires a tearing apart in order to create a new order and higher level of consciousness” (Cajete, 2016, p. 370). Understanding that this “process begins with a deep and

abiding respect for the “spirit” of each child from before the moment of birth” (Cajete, 2016, p. 372). Within the work of Cajete, he explained about the stages of life and the transition from one to the next.

1. The first stage of Indigenous education therefore revolves around learning within the family, learning the first aspects of culture, and learning how to adapt and integrate one’s unique personality in a family context. The first stage ends with gaining an orientation place. Education in the second stage revolves around social learning, being introduced to Tribal society, and learning how to live in the natural environment.
2. The second stage ends with the gaining of a sense of Tribal history. It includes learning how to apply knowledge to day-to-day living and developing a sense for tribal tradition.
3. The third stage revolves around melding individual needs with group needs through the processes of initiation, the learning of guiding myths, and participation in ritual and ceremony. This stage ends with the development of a profound and deep connection to tradition.
4. The fourth stage is a midpoint in which the individual achieves a high level of integration with the culture and attains a certain degree of peace of mind. It brings the individual a certain level of empowerment and personal vitality and maturity. But it is only the middle place of life.
5. The fifth stage is a period of searching for a life vision, a time of pronounced individuation and the development of “mythical” thinking. This stage concludes with the development of a deep understanding of relationship and diversity.

6. The sixth stage ushers in a period of major transformation characterized by deep learning about the unconsciousness. It is also a time of great travail, disintegration, wounding, and pain, which paves the way for an equally great reintegration and healing process to begin in the final stage. The pain, wound, and conflict act as a bridge to the seventh stage. In the seventh stage, deep healing occurs in which the self “mutualizes” with body, mind, and spirit. In this stage deep understanding, enlightenment, and wisdom are gained. This stage ends with the attainment of a high level of spiritual understanding, which acts as a bridge to the finding of one’s true center and the transformation to *“being a complete man or woman in that place that Indian people talk about”* (Cajete, 2016, p. 372).

Belonging

The final theme that emerged from the literature review of community was *belonging*. Cajete also talks about it as a feeling of being connected. One of his quotes that resonated with me and was in alignment with my research was:

Community is also the context in which the “affective” dimension of education unfolds. It is the “place” where one comes to know what it is to be related. It is the place of sharing life through everyday acts, through song, dance, story, and celebration. It is the place of teaching, learning, making art, and sharing thoughts, feelings, joy, and grief. It is the place for feeling and being “connected.” **The community is the place where each person can, metaphorically speaking, “become complete” and express the fullness of their life,** “it is that place that Indian people talks about” (Cajete, 2016, p.366)

Within his text, he stated the importance of community leadership understanding that it takes a strong leader to be able to unite a group of people and get them to the finish line. The

importance of leadership being able to “develop a basic conceptual framework for Indigenous community leadership, it is important that the relationship of Indigenous education to establishing and maintaining individual and community wholeness also be seriously considered” (Cajete, 2016, p. 369).

Within belonging and community, Cajete also stated the importance of education. He shared, “Educating and enlivening the inner self is the life-centered imperative of Indigenous education embodied in the metaphor, “seeking life” or for “life’s sake.” (Cajete, 2016, p. 369). He also talked about education being transformative multiple times. To me, education can be anything we envision it to be. Cajete states, “Education for wholeness, by striving for a level of harmony between individuals and their world, is an ancient foundation of the educational process of all cultures. In its most natural dimension, all Indigenous education is transformative and nature-centered. (Cajete, 2016, p. 369) In order to achieve a transformative approach to education, one must be

. . . distinctly integrative and cross-cultural because it is referenced to the deepest human drives. From this viewpoint, all human beings concern themselves with self-empowerment and with whatever enables them to transform their lives and the conditions in which they live; such a viewpoint engenders the intent of people striving to create whole, happy, prosperous, and fulfilling lives. (Cajete, 2016, p. 369)

In closing, Cajete shared that education is the key to creating belonging by having stated, Indigenous education helped each person to “find life” and thereby realize a level of completeness in their life. Therefore, the exploration of many different vehicles and approaches to learning was encouraged. This was done with the understanding that each individual would find the right one for them in their own time. (Cajete, 2016, p. 372)

The framework and concepts stated within this section about helping each students find life are the frameworks I reference with I mention using the Honorable House of Learning Framework with the LNS education system by using the school as a tool to help each child become empowered to realize the completeness in their life. [re-structure sentence]

Gifted and Talented Program

Within my story-sharing session, there was a theme presented that required further secondary research to gain knowledge regarding what the Gifted and Talented program was along with the pros and cons of this program. Washington State's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) no longer calls its enrichment program Gifted and Talented, but instead it is called the Highly Capable Program. Their definition of their program is as follows:

Washington's Highly Capable Program is a component of the state's program of basic education. School districts provide instruction, activities, and services that accelerate learning for young learners identified as Highly Capable. To be eligible for identification, students must be enrolled in a school district, charter school, or tribal-education compact school. Districts must define an educational program for Highly Capable students, and comply with specific program-related provisions that, integrated as a whole across the K–12 continuum, will deliver a comprehensive and equitable education for Highly Capable students. (OSPI, n.d.)

There was no significant information about how one qualifies for the program, what services are provided to the student, or how they are assessed.

There is a lot of literature regarding creating models for gifted and talented programs within schools as well as taking a creative pedagogical approach to teaching and learning. There has been a lot of frustration with Western teaching approaches that have stayed stagnant for

centuries. In one piece of literature titled “*Enrichment and gifted education pedagogy to develop talents, gifts, and creative productivity*” the author stated, “Too often we have heard numerous testimonials from creative teachers about administrative insistence on scripted lessons, the need to teach the same lesson on the same day in the same format to every student in a grade level across the district, and diminished opportunities to teach creatively, accompanied by a loss of creative opportunities for talent development and enrichment. (Reis et al., 2021, p. 1). To address these issues defined, schools need a more creative approach which this author called enrichment pedagogy which “enables students to experience advanced-level learning, critical and creative thinking and problem solving, and the motivation to pursue rigorous and rewarding work” (Reis et al., 2021, p. 1). Their issues with district Gifted and Talented programs is with the “theories in which enrichment is selected by teachers or curricular opportunities that are selected for their appropriate content and curriculum for enrichment (Reis et al., 2021, p. 1). This literature talked about a Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) which:

. . . provides enriched learning experiences and higher learning standards for all children through three goals; developing talents in all children, providing a broad range of advanced-level enrichment experiences for all students, and follow-up advanced learning for children based on interests and strong motivation to pursue a topic of special interest. (Reis et al., 2021, p. 1).

It is important to note that current literature does acknowledge the issues with Gifted and Talented programs and the selection of specific individuals to be offered the opportunity to advance and excel in their area of interest. The LNS schools should have a model such as (SEM), which is available to all students. There is a lot of flexibility in making the Gifted and Talented

program fit the needs of LNS. As stated on the OSPI website- these programs are to be defined for each specific district by the district (OSOPI, n.d.).

Chapter 3: A Methodological Strategy

In my research, I used an Indigenous paradigm and metaphor to help tell a story about the research I conducted. Indigenous paradigms are important because they help develop tools that allow research within an Indigenous community that can potentially create meaningful change (Wilson, 2008). Using an Indigenous paradigm allowed me to describe my worldview by combining social reality, ways of knowing, and ethics and values (Jones et al., 2018). I included story sharing and metaphors as tools to help build my framework within my research paradigm. Within Indigenous communities ". . . stories and metaphors are used as teaching tools, they allow the listeners to draw their own conclusion and gain life lessons from a more personal perspective" (Wilson, 2008, p. 17). Indigenous conceptual frameworks make "visible the way we see the world and provides insight into the researchers' beliefs about knowledge production and how those beliefs will impact the research" (Kovach, 2009, p.41).

Key Concepts

After reviewing my problem statement, four key concepts have emerged: traditional forms of education, identity development, educational sovereignty, and belonging. I think that it is crucial for me first to take the time to define these from my perspective as they are the foundation on which this research will be built.

Traditional Forms of Education

During the Pre-Contact era, we had education systems that ensured the transmission of sacred knowledge (Jones et al., 2018). We learned first by observation then by doing. The land was our teacher, and our family were our mentors. Story sharing played an important role in teaching life lessons that were needed for survival. Traditional forms of education are defined as pre-contact ways of teaching and learning.

Identity Development

Identity Development is defined as knowing who you are, where you come from, and your people's values, teachings, and beliefs. Having a strong identity is essential because it allows you to stay grounded in who you are. When you know who you are and where you come from, you are connected to a place. When you are connected to a place, you cannot feel lost or incomplete. One quote I've heard my Grandmother say is, "you teach your children what you know, and you also teach your children what you don't know." If our children don't have a strong sense of identity, we will not restore the generational gap.

Educational Sovereignty

Educational sovereignty is defined as "a people's right to rebuild its demand to exist and present its gifts to the world" (Aguilera-Black Bear, 2014, p. 5). Educational sovereignty occurs when communities confront and challenge Western educational structures by creating and implementing educational systems that embrace their values, beliefs, culture, and traditional knowledge (Aguilera-Black Bear, 2015, p. 5). This is where we acknowledge that we are a sovereign nation and have the right to determine what is best for our people.

Belonging

Belonging is a feeling felt once someone knows who they are and where they come from. It is an accomplishment of identifying and mastering gifts. It's receiving knowledge and then, in return devoting your life to your community. Belonging is defined as knowing who you are individually and your role within the community.

Personal Epistemology

A person's worldview is constantly shaped by people, places, and experiences throughout their life. My worldview has been shaped by my elders and the experiences I have shared with

them. I am who I am today because of my lineage, the values, and the teachings that continue to be shared within my family from generation to generation. Our worldview (epistemology) asks us what sources of our knowledge are, what a person can know, and how we know if something is true (Chilisa, 2012). The greatest difference between Indigenous epistemology and the dominant paradigm is the belief that knowledge is an individual entity; in Indigenous epistemology, the belief is that knowledge is relational (Dei, 2013).

I reflect on my research journey and my passion for education, thinking back to why I originally became passionate about finding solutions for achieving educational sovereignty. I came to realize it stemmed from my relationship with my Grandparents. My late Grandfather, William Jones Sr., was an amazing leader of the Lummi Nation. He was a politician, and his love for his people was immense. He had a strong focus on education and believed it was the tool our people needed to become self-determined. He saw the children in the community struggling within the public education system, so he went to Washington D.C., and fought to secure funds for the Lummi Nation to have its tribal school. His goal was for the community to have its own school so the children could learn without external barriers and within their own community.

I grew up knowing the importance of education to the Lummi people. If you look at the Lummi cradle-to-grave education model here on our reservation, you see that our past leaders had a vision that our people could stay within their homeland territories and learn from the day they were born until they crossed over to the spiritual world. In our language, we have a word that describes a belief, *sela-lexw*, which means the knowledge and advice we need to guide our daily lives comes from our old people. I know the reality of my worldview because of the relations with my elders, and the words they share with me are what I use to guide me in my research.

Axiology

A person's values, also known as axiology, have been shaped by the family and community in which they exist. According to Chilisa, "axiology gives reference to the analysis of our values to help us better understand their meanings, characteristics, purpose, origins, and how we accept this as true knowledge (Chilisa, 2012, p.21). When I thought about the values and experiences that helped shape who I am today, I stopped and thought about why this work is important. What have I done to prepare myself to do this work?

Throughout my journey, I have had to do a lot of self-reflection on leadership and my role within leadership. It made me reflect on what Indigenous leadership is and what makes a great leader. Now that I shared my research journey and research question(s), I reflected on what leadership skills are needed to carry this work out successfully. Do I possess the skills necessary to carry this work forward?

I think back to my earliest leadership memory and what being a leader means to me. It brings me back to my childhood and remembering being a young girl and having a collage on my bedroom wall of my late Grandfather's pictures and above it stated, "Wall of Fame." The pictures included photos of my Grandfather and Bill Clinton, Gary Locke, and other politicians whose names I can no longer recall. My Grandfather served on our tribal council for as long as I can remember. He devoted his life to the Lummi people. It is incredible that even at such a young age, I knew that my Grandfather had a gift in leading the people.

I often think of what made my Grandfather a great leader. Upon much reflection, I think about how my Grandfather used the teachings of the canoe to guide him in his leadership journey. The teachings that he used to guide the youth he mentored were handed down to him

from his Grandfather, taught to him by his Grandfather, and so on. He believed in getting the people in our community to work together towards a common goal.

Many people from the outside see war canoe racing as a sport, but to us, it is a way of life. The teaching you learn from the canoe helps guide you through life. We believe that the canoe is alive, and it has a spirit. For the paddlers to get the canoe to move, all eleven paddlers must be one. Not only physically but spiritually. One heart, one mind, one paddle. In Shawn Wilson's book *research is ceremony*, he talks about a similar concept "If it is possible to get every single person in a room thinking the same thing for only two seconds a miracle will happen." We have a word for this "*netse mot i sholwen*" one heart, one mind in our language.

Getting everyone to work hard and work together wasn't something that just happened quickly. You must lead by example. Your paddlers only work as hard as they see their leader working. There are times when you feel defeated and feel like giving up, but the canoe teaches you that you must be strong physically and mentally. Crossing the finish line doesn't come without obstacles, and it isn't an easy task by any means. The canoe teaches you that anything is possible when you are connected mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

I was asked about my leadership values and what guides our leadership philosophy in a class during my doctoral journey. I explained to my instructor about the canoe and the different roles within the canoe. As I get to the skipper seat, which is one of the most important seats of the canoe, I begin to become conflicted with whom I wanted to put there. Am I ready to be the skipper of my canoe- I reflected upon this for a while.

Being a skipper of the canoe is a teaching passed down from generation to generation in my family. My late Grandfather Willie Jones was an amazing skipper, and he taught my father William Jones Jr. everything he knew. In an interview with Wayne Morris, he stated, "strategy is

one key to being a good skipper. You must be able to read the water and visually see the tides and which direction the water is flowing." For years the skipper of a canoe has been dominantly a "man's seat." When I was 13 years old, I told my Dad I wanted to be a skipper. I was half-joking, maybe a little wishful. He said you are just as strong as the boys. You could do that easily. He began to let me take my peers and steer the canoe. I immediately fell in love with that seat as it was such an adrenaline rush. I can't explain the feeling, but I felt like that was where I belonged, that is where I felt connected, that is where I felt whole.

The first time he let me skipper in a race, I took out the young girls in the canoe and was the only women skipper out there. We raced alongside other canoes that had man skippers and battled all the way around. We came in second, but I will not forget the look on the other canoe's faces as they realized it was a girl skipper they were racing. As hard as it is to put myself in the skippers' seat in my canoe, I must gain confidence in myself. I have been preparing for this my whole life. Since a young age, they have been teaching me what it takes to be a skipper and the teachings that come alongside.

When I am conducting work, I always find myself using the canoe as a metaphor to help explain my connection, because to me the canoe is everything. These are the teachings that help guide me in my leadership role. My Grandfather passed, but his teaching lives within me. I hope to continue to use the canoe's teaching to help guide me on my journey into leadership.

Ontology

In ontology, an emphasis is placed on the I/we relationships as opposed to the Western ideology of the I/you relationship, where the emphasis is placed on the individual (Northwest Indian College, 2019, p.4). In this research, we are not doing this work for ourselves; we are doing this work so that future generations do not have to work so hard to break barriers set in

place that are designed to fail us. I acknowledge that the work we do is for the generations to come, just as our ancestors did for us. I think about where I learned the idea of community over self. I think about my late Grandfather and how he devoted his life to his people. There were birthdays, anniversaries, and special occasions that were missed, but to him, the needs of the community always came first. I think about my father and his dedication to the canoe. As a mentor, he devotes his summers to the youth by coaching them in war-canoe racing. There is no individual benefit for him other than knowing that by being there for the children, he is providing the teachings of the canoe in hopes it will help guide them through life.

Methodology

There are four Indigenous methods that are used within an Indigenous research paradigm, which entails story sharing, language, genealogy, and origin and creation story. Genealogy tells us about our inherent rights and describes our responsibility to the generations before and after us (Northwest Indian College, 2018, p.6). Genealogy can be used as a method to specifically map out my own family tree to visually show the generational gap in the imprinting of family knowledge due to the impacts of colonization. Language is the foundation of who we are as a people, it is critical to forming cultural identity. Indigenous languages have deeper and more specific meanings than English; therefore, this method is an important aspect of conducting Indigenous research (Northwest Indian College, 2018, p.7). I used language as a method in my research to guide me. Connecting my research to the language is important because it lets me know that the work I am doing is in alignment with who we are as Lummi people. Origin and creation stories are an important method for Indigenous research; these stories are far more than just stories; these stories tell the history of our people, and how we came to be, and they show us that we all have a place (Northwest Indian College, 2018, p.7). I planned on using origin and

creation stories as a method to identify what our pre-contact values, beliefs, and life lessons are as Lummi people and instill those into the proposed outcomes of this research.

My main method of collecting data was through Story Sharing, which may be described as an informal interview session. Story sharing allows people to tell their own stories on their own terms. This is less about participants answering a question and more about the story sharers' experience surrounding the question that you asked (Northwest Indian College, 2018, p.7). Instead of having a set of questions and anticipating a specific answer, I shared with the participant what my research focus was and allow them to share what they feel is relevant to the research. An example of this is during my bachelor's program, I would go to my late Grandfather for advice about my homework or have a story-sharing session on a research project. I would tell him about my topic, and he would tell me a story in return. He would never give me an answer but instead replied with an experience.

Indigenous Research Paradigm

In my research, I used an Indigenous paradigm and metaphor to help tell a story about my research. Indigenous paradigms are important because they help develop tools that allow research within an Indigenous community that can potentially create meaningful change (Wilson, 2008). By using an Indigenous paradigm, it allowed me to describe my worldview by combining social reality, ways of knowing, and ethics and values (Jones et al., 2018). Shawn Wilson (2008) stated, "Eurocentric research has helped in the colonization and oppression of our people" (pg. 13). Indigenous research paradigms are important because they allow us to determine what is important and what is valid (Wilson, 2008).

I must include story sharing and metaphors as tools to help build my framework within my research paradigm. Within Indigenous communities' "stories and metaphors are used as

teaching tools, they allow the listeners to draw their own conclusion and gain life lessons from a more personal perspective" (Wilson, 2008, p. 17). Indigenous conceptual frameworks make it "visible the way we see the world and provides inside into the researchers' beliefs about knowledge production and how those beliefs will impact the research" (Kovach, 2009, p.41).

Indigenous Theories

The three theories I used to help guide my research question and area of study are relational accountability, transformative theory, and empowerment theory. The use of these specific three theories is derived from my own personal educational journey and how I have come to know the issues that impact my research are valid. It was through relational accountability that I learned the importance of community before self. Understanding that in order to make a change, I must first establish a relationship/connection, only then can I find solutions to help it transform, and lastly, I must be able to feel empowered to see it through. I understand that using all three of these theories may run into some obstacles, but I feel passionate that this is a three-part journey and that I cannot reach one without experiencing the others.

Relational Accountability (Object Relations Theory)

Relational accountability is based on Chilisa (2012) and Wilson (2008). Their texts describe this theory as identifying all objects within the researcher's environment to which they relate. These relationships include relationships with the water, land, animals, plants, stories, and living and non-living people. Within this theory, you must understand that your choices affect everything within the environment, affecting all relations (Wilson, 2008). When I think of relational accountability, I think about the importance of acknowledging that it is my responsibility to ensure that I leave this world a better place than I entered it.

Transformative Theory

I learned about Transformative Theory from reading Dr. Lexie Tom's dissertation where she stated that "to understand how to operate within an Indigenous framework, participants will need to transform their thinking (2018, p. 53). Understanding that "transformative learning theory is based on the notion that we interpret our experiences in our own way, and that how we see the world is a result of our perceptions of our experiences" (Tom, 2018, p. 54). This is important because we need to change our thinking to create and implement creative solutions.

The importance of self-determination is stated by Smith, "self-determination is more than a political goal. It becomes the goal of social justice expressed in a wide range of psychological, social, cultural, and economical terrains. It involves transformation, decolonization, healing, and mobilization as people (1999, p.120).

Empowerment Theory

The last theory within the literature was about empowerment. I learned about the empowerment theory from Dr. Greg Mahle while attending the Northwest Indian College who states "the root of empowerment is power, it is not a commanding or demanding power; it is the power of recognition and voice" (Northwest Indian College, 2018, p.6). Dr. Mahle states "recognition occurs when somebody has been in an oppressive state and has realized that the current condition is detrimental to themselves, their families, and their people"(Northwest Indian College, 2018, p.6). Empowerment theory "encourages people to envision a future for their people and works to move their people in a direction free of oppression" (Northwest Indian College, 2018, p.6). This happens last when you acknowledge your relations and transform your thinking. Now you are ready to create and implement change.

Methods

Data Analysis

For my data analysis, I used an open coding method. Open coding “refers to the process of breaking down data into themes, patterns, and concepts to create a meaningful story from the volume of data (Chilisa, 2020, p.257). Shawn Wilson refers to this as a mixed-method approach that blends data collection and that data analysis (Wilson, 2008, p.131). He stated, “As I was listening, I was learning, and as I was learning I was sharing. It shaped the direction of the research and the results of the research in turn allowed for further analysis (p.131). My research journey was guided by stories and lived experienced and as I was obtaining knowledge, I was analyzing. The themes that are presented in this research stemmed from both primary and secondary research. I did not transcribe my primary and secondary research word for word, but I took what I felt was meant for me and continued to have story-sharing sessions until I felt that I had the context needed to analyze and interpret what was being shared. Wilson shared, “Knowledge cannot be owned or discovered but is merely a set of relationships that may be given a visible form” (Wilson, 2008, p.127). This is one of the powers of being able to use Indigenous methods such as story sharing as it “allows both the listener and tellers to gain understandings, to do a self-analysis, and to make new decisions that enable people-owned research-driven interventions and development program” (Chilisa, 2020, p.194).

In Bagele Chilisa's book titled *Indigenous Research Methodologies* she describes the functions of the *counterstory narrative*, which is a form of storytelling that can be used to teach us that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone” (Chilisa, 2020, p. 195).

During my story-sharing sessions for data collection and my data analysis, it was important that I

focused less on identifying themes and more on what the message was that the participant shared and how it related to my research questions.

The coding process that was used stemmed from my literature review. The research design that was proposed was to use the data to identify themes that pertained to educational sovereignty. The purpose of the story-sharing session was to look at pre-contact Indigenous education, Indigenous mentorship, and Indigenous youth leadership and incorporate those teachings within the Lummi Nation Education Systems. Without making any pre-concluded assumptions, some areas of interest for Lummi Nation School would be looking at creating programs pertaining to Indigenous mentorship, Indigenous Leadership, and Indigenous Transitions. The quantitative data will be used to identify problems and barriers that may arise when it comes to achieving Educational Sovereignty within the Lummi Nation and create and implement a solution that can exist within the Lummi Nation School.

Timeline

The timeline of this research spanned more than five months from when I received approval from the University of Washington Institutional Review Board (IRB) on November 8, 2022, and NWIC IRB on November 28, 2022. The research consisted of holding story-sharing sessions with six participants in various locations within the Lummi Nation. The participants consisted of current faculty from LNS, past faculty of LNS, master carvers, language speakers, and traditional leaders. These story-sharing sessions ranged between 30-60 minutes in length. I started off the conversation by sharing with them my name, where I was from, and who my parents and grandparents are. It helps the participants know your family tree as sharing knowledge with others is always something that elders and community members are always weary of because of the misuse of information that has happened in the past. Once they knew

who I was, I shared the purpose of my research by explaining my education journey and how I got to where I was today. There were some specific questions I wanted answered but I asked participants: after listening to my research topic what do you feel you can contribute to this discussion? I went over to consent form which laid out the benefits of participating in this research, potential harms, understanding that this research is voluntary, and how the information shared would be used.

Protection of Human Subjects

One of the essential pieces of ensuring the protection of human subjects is having a strong informed consent process. In my informed consent form, I addressed the three principles of the common rule. My consent form will consist of all three sections of the Belmont report, including each section: the purpose of research, participation in research, benefits of research, the potential harm of research, how data collected is used, waiver of confidentiality, consent for audio and/or recording, contact information, and participant signature.

During my story-sharing sessions, I explained the informal and organic story-sharing process in my consent form to ensure my participants were informed. The story-sharing sessions ranged from 1-2 story-sharing sessions that lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour in length. I got permission from each participant to audio record. This was so that I could listen to the stories, take them in, and then work on coding and transcribing after the story-sharing session. The purpose is to respect the shared stories by being fully present instead of taking notes.

It was essential to have a review process of the information shared following the story-sharing sessions. It's important to take the time to allow participants to vet the information shared. Sometimes our interpretation of what we believe our participant is saying could be

incorrect. Another purpose of the review is to share with the participant how the information they shared will be presented in all audio recordings, writing, and other visual representations.

It was also vital that the participant knew that this research was voluntary. The participant could end the story-sharing session and leave the research at any point throughout this process. Participation in this research did not guarantee anonymity or confidentiality of the information shared. The participant would be acknowledged as the direct contributor to any information, direct quotes, or summarization of ideas shared within this research and its findings. Participation in this research required a waiver of confidentiality, acknowledging that any information shared in the research process will be connected to their name.

Another vital area of the consent portion was explaining the benefits of this research. My current research intends to create a mentorship/transitioning process that will help generate belonging and community. This will help guide future educational planning, development, and policy in the Lummi Nation. The potential benefits of this research include:

- Guidance for future educational planning at the LNS.
- The possible use of research in developing future curriculum and educational material at LNS.
- Rebuilding the Lummi Nation by empowering our youth.

Along with the benefits, I explained the potential risk of participating in this research. Participation in this research included a potential risk for emotional and social harm. I recognized that the Lummi peoples historical relationship with education is connected to the traumas and losses experienced by missionaries and boarding schools. It was important for me to explain to the participant that if they became emotionally upset or unwell at any point during the research process, to let the researcher know. If this happens, I would have asked them to take a

break, and if they were still feeling distressed, we could end the story-sharing session. There were also signs to watch for if a participant is feeling uneasy. With story-sharing sessions, it is important not to push a question but instead let the participant share what is in their heart. One way to end the conversation is to let them know that sharing the stories will help build future generations.

I genuinely felt that the benefits of this research outweighed the potential harm. Within the consent form, I listed potential harms. In my research, I believed that potential damage could include emotional discomfort, feelings of fear, loss, and sadness related to memories or stories about education, and increased stress from experiencing emotional discomforts during story-sharing sessions. One area of focus is a person's political reputation with a position they have on a particular subject area. On the consent form, I noted potential damage to social reputation or personal relationships from disagreements or misunderstandings that come from information shared in this research.

I also feel like participants needed to know how this data would be shared and understand that the information shared will be used in a presentation within a classroom setting at The University of Washington-Tacoma—also, informing participants that the sole ownership of all the research data, findings, and information shared will be given to the Lummi Nation upon completion of the study. Upon approval from the Lummi Nation and participants' informed consent, the research data, findings, and information shared may also be used for educational purposes at Northwest Indian College, where I serve as a faculty member.

Lastly, there was a section where participants acknowledge that this research will not protect their confidentiality of shared information. They were asked to give consent to the researcher, including their name with any information, understanding the potential harms of

participating in this research without confidentiality and agreeing to waive their anonymity as participants in this research.

I wanted to ensure the safety and well-being of my participants. I felt that our Lummi people have been through enough historical trauma pertaining to research, and I must give them a positive experience to continue sharing. These story-sharing sessions are more than research; they are rebuilding and weaving the pieces of history together so they can be secured for generations to come.

This research went through two separate IRB application processes which include The University of Washington IRB and the NWIC IRB. A part of the NWIC IRB application process was to obtain a letter of support from the Lummi Nation that stated they approve of the research being conducted.

Validity

I was able to ensure validity by vetting the information back to the participant. This allows the participant to reach my interpretation of their words to ensure they are in alignment. Using an Indigenous research paradigm will ensure validity by ensuring my relational accountability. As Shawn Wilson stated, "I am responsible for whom I share this with, that it is shared in the appropriate way, at the right place and right time" (2008, p.126). Wilson also stated that:

accountability is built into relationships that are formed in storytelling within an oral tradition. As a storyteller, I am responsible for whom I share information and ensure that it is shared in an appropriate way, at the right place and time. In receiving the story into a

relational context that makes sense for you and for listening with an open heart and open mind. (Wilson, 2008, p.126)

The dissemination of information is a part of the process of ensuring validity, but also allowing myself to hear the stories and understand the messages or life lessons the reader is trying to convey. This comes with the lessons that go hand in hand with using the Indigenous story-sharing method as well as all other Indigenous research protocols mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter 4 Findings

Story Sharing Session George Swanaset

My first story-sharing session was with Nooksack Elder George Swanaset who is a master canoe builder, and who shared with me about his journey into canoe building and who mentored him into mastering his gift. At the beginning of the story-sharing session, I shared with him my topic and area of focus for the research. I told him I had been looking at achieving educational sovereignty, with an emphasis on rebuilding the community by focusing on mentorship, transitions, and belonging. My basic guiding overview questions for him were:

- What does Indigenous Mentorship mean to you?
- Who mentored you in mastering your gift?
- What was the process of learning to master your gift?

George talked a lot about his Grandfather and the role his Grandfather played in his life. When he was a young boy, his Grandfather gave him a hatchet, and the first thing he did was went and cut down a small tree with it. He said when his Grandfather found out, he scolded him for it. Told him there were protocols for cutting down trees and asking if he followed them. His Grandfather told him you must tell the tree what you are doing, and you must give it thanks. This is when he learned the importance of respect for the cedar tree.

When I asked him about canoe building, he said it was a lot of trial and error. His first canoe was the Little Thunder and he completed that in 1981. He talked about his mentors and how he would go to them, and they would give him different techniques to try. One thing he shared was how, when you are building canoes, they do not always turn out, but you must finish it anyways. He shared one thing that stuck with me; I expected to hear more from George on

canoe building and how he learned to become a master carver, but he spent a lot of time talking about the youth and how learning respect early in life is so important. He shared about a time when he was contracted to come to teach carving to the middle school and high school kids, and it was difficult for him because there was a disconnect between what he was talking about and why it was important for them to learn those values. He said that “children need to learn that knowing the answer isn’t the key, but knowing how you got there is. You must learn to paddle before you can skip.”

When I talked to him about pre-contact village systems, he talked about how he knew about the village structure and how everyone within the village possessed a gift. He shared, “everyone had a role, we would trade for different things within the community. We needed each other to survive, and you did not step in other people’s area.” This created a dependency on one another for the survival and the foundation on which community was built.

My main take away from my visit with George is that the values and foundation must be taught at a young age for the child to be able to accept gifts. If you do not have a deep understanding and the respect for the Lummi tribal values, then your heart is not open to listening, learning, and accepting gifts.

Story Sharing Session With Dr. Lexie Tom

My second story-sharing session was with Dr. Lexie Tom who is a Lummi Tribal member and currently holds the position of Education Director for LNS. It was important for me to sit down and talk with Dr. Tom about what is currently happening within the school and the specific barriers that are in place when it comes to the incorporation of mentorship, transitions, and belonging. My basic guiding overview questions for her were:

- What are the barriers set in place that prevent the decolonization of the education system?
- What do mentorship and transition mean to the Lummi Nation School?

The story-sharing session was more than an hour in length with great discussion about what is currently going on in the school, potential gaps, and barriers in place that prevent the decolonization of education at LNS. The story-sharing session started out with my explaining my research journey and how I had come to the focus I am at today with achieving educational sovereignty.

Dr. Tom started off the story sharing session talking about how we have a system in place like mentorship programs that were focused on relationships. Since then, we have been very disconnected to those systems and our sovereign right to educate our own has been chipped away at generation by generation. She expressed that we are now trying to get back control with tribal school but still limited due to state and federal regulations that must be followed.

When it comes to mentorship and transitions at LNS she shared two existing models that is place called the “gifted and talented program” and “transitions program.” When I asked what both of these programs were, she explained that if a student was showing interest in a specific academic area that they could be identified as gifted and talented and would receive a specialized plan that helped accelerate their learning and understanding of that subject area. For transition it was a service provided to children 14-18 years old to ensure they were ready to transition into adulthood. For the gifted and talented program, once someone was identified as “gifted” they would spend a certain amount of time each week exploring and advancing on the specific

subject. The gifted and talented teacher would create specialized lessons for the students so they could accelerate expanding their knowledge base.

Although both programs sounded like they might be in alignment with the village structure and honorable house of learning framework, they were focused on a few academic subject areas. While gifted and talented was open to all students, the transitions program was only made available to students who qualified for special education services or had a 504 plan¹ but both programs were housed under the Special Education Director at LNS. She spoke about the possibility of making this building-wide and making the program grow and making it more intentional.

We then talked about how we could potentially make this a model that was school-wide with a cultural approach. I expressed my self-reflection as a research concept and how I give thanks to where I am today because I was exposed to basic foundational values of what it means to be Lummi as well as a family and mentors that took time to share stories with me. We imagined a program where we could indigenize the gifted and talented program so that instead of focusing solely on academics, it took a cultural approach to ensure that each student at the LNS was exposed to various cultural arts. It was then that Dr. Tom talked about her own children who are always doing song and dance outside of school. She said this is something that they would not have been exposed to if not for LNS.

Dr. Tom then shared a project that she is working on: expanding the cultural curriculum. Currently, there are various teachers doing various projects with no clear goals or benchmarks for assessment. If they could create a culture curriculum that was in alignment with the language

¹This refers to a specialized education plan as required by law and outlined in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. For additional context and information, see: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>.

standards, students could be exposed to a wide variety of knowledge with the plan of expanding each year.

Expanding on the cultural curriculum would require having volunteers, mentors, and/or teachers with the clearance and capacity to teach the Lummi culture. Getting volunteers that are willing to work within the school with the children is an uncommon occurrence. Long ago, within the village structure, mentoring was a part of our relational accountability. It was something we did because we knew it was going to help the next generation, without expecting something in return. Today, if someone wanted to volunteer at LNS there is an extensive process they must go through with includes dealing with Lummi Indian Business Council (LIBC) Human Resources Department to do an extensive background check as well as a urine analysis test.

As far as teaching and being a part of the staff at LNS, there is an opportunity through Washington State and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to obtain a First Peoples' Language, Culture and Oral Traditions Certification. The purpose of obtaining the certificate is that tribal members can be accredited to teach language, culture, and oral traditions within the K-12 setting. This certification is to empower people who can “contribute to the prevention, recovery, revitalization, and promotion of First Peoples’ languages and provides the opportunity for tribal children to learn their language while at school” (Professional Educator Standards Board, 2023). Dr. Tom also emphasized that they must go through the LIBC culture department to obtain access to receiving this certificate. She shared that teaching K-6 was an easier task as far as obtaining a certificate because they do not enter grades or attendance for students. But if a tribal member wanted to teach at the upper level, grades 7 - 12, they would be required to take an extra step through OSPI to get certified because they are responsible for attendance and grades.

From there we talked about different potential models that could be community driven. She talked about three different levels of cultural knowledge which included community knowledge, family knowledge, and sacred knowledge. Within the LNS, they focus on community knowledge, which is baseline information that students need access to have a sense of belonging or to understand what it means to Lummi. The family knowledge would be things that should not be taught within the school and should only come from family. Sacred knowledge is something that is only taught from the knowledge keepers who possess that knowledge. Our conversation went further into exploring what would be considered community knowledge. We talked about Lummi Values to Guide Lummi Education. She explains that there are general values that can be incorporated into the school system that would be considered community knowledge these include respect, reciprocity, integrity, and responsibility.



Figure 3. Cultural Knowledge Diagram. This figure demonstrates the levels of cultural knowledge and breaks it down between community knowledge, family knowledge, and sacred knowledge.(2023).

We ended our story-sharing session by envisioning a model for a hybrid gifted and talented program that is both cultural and academic with an individualized plan that we could ensure is completed. Dr. Tom expressed that there are a lot of students who get lost in transition and if every student had an individualized plan we provide each child with the opportunity to be

exposed to community knowledge. There are currently models in place within the school that provide the opportunity to be expanded; these include the Gifted and Talented, the Transitions Program, and the Career and Technical Education (CTE) senior project-based program.

In closing, Dr. Tom shared that currently, they have electives available for grades 7-12 in carving, cooking, and cultural arts with the flexibility to incorporate more. For grades K-6 it is more complex because they only have two culture teachers that see a total of 14 classes. They are block schedules and a culture teacher only sees each class 2 times per week. She stated if LNS was looking to do more of an enrichment program with cultural activities, then summer school had a lot more flexibility.

I enjoyed my story-sharing session with Dr. Tom as I could tell there is a lot of great work happening at LNS and a lot of great work to come. I hope that after this research is complete, I can continue to work with Dr. Tom in identifying barriers LNS is faced with when it comes to achieving educational sovereignty at LNS.

Story Sharing Session Lawrence Solomon “Si’alheleq”

After I spoke with Dr. Tom, I was really interested in what she shared about her own children and how they thrive with song and dance at LNS. It was from personal experience working at the LNS for 10 years that I knew that participating in song and dance at LNS meant being a part of the Blackhawk Singers. It was from there that I decided my next story-sharing would be held with Lawrence Solomon who is a traditional leader within the Lummi Nation. Lawrence Solomon, whose traditional name is Si’alheleq, is an *oksale* (teacher) not only in everyday life but also *oksale* at the LNS. He has a huge part in the creation of the Blackhawk Singers, and I knew he would have a lot of stories to share with me about them.

When I shared with him about my research topic and asked questions about how we can use the education system as a tool to help children build and strong self of self-identity and create belonging, he began to tell me a story of the Blackhawk Singers and how they came to be.

Presently the Blackhawk singers are Lummi youth who dance, sing, and perform for people nationwide. They are known for their strength, admiration, and talent as they glide across the floor and sing with their rich voices. For my research I was more interested in how the Blackhawk singers came to be, and the connection between being a part of the Blackhawk singers and the feeling of belonging that it gives our Lummi youth.

Within the past 10 years, there has been a resurgence of the incorporation of culture with the youth. When the Pacific Northwest tribes brought back the canoe journey, along with it came the practice of song and dance. Within the Lummi Nation, there are a handful of dance groups that are family orientated. Meaning they are run by specific families, and you dance with that family, only if you are a part of the family.

When I sat down and talked with Lawrence, he stated this was a large part of why he started the Blackhawk Singers. Lawrence stated that one summer he and his mate Denise Solomon were asked to teach summer school at LNS, and he spent the summer teaching the children a few songs and dances. That next fall, in 2013, the LNS Principal asked both to come back and be regular full-time culture teachers. During that first year, he would do songs and dance with the children many of whom were shy. There was a group of two or three students that really took to it, and they started helping with honoring assemblies. They were taught the basics of the ceremony as they wrapped and honored staff members, Lawrence said “We explained what we were doing to the non-Native staff member and to the students at the same time, so we were all learning together at the same time” (Solomon, 2023). Lawrence said that as they began

doing the assemblies and honoring, more and more kids wanted to join and become a part of the group. It was important to acknowledge that these children would likely not be given the opportunity to be introduced to song and dance if it was not for LNS and the creation of the Blackhawk Singers.

As they begin to grow, one of the obstacles they faced was not having very many songs to teach the children. Within Coastal Song and Dance, there is ownership of certain songs. In other words: each canoe family composed their own songs and dance, and they had ownership over those songs. Lawrence shared that there were some canoe families that were generous and allowed the Blackhawk Singers to sing and dance their songs as the children were learning. He expressed his gratitude for them allowing them to use their songs and dance to teach the children and always acknowledged the owners every time they would perform. The second obstacle was not having regalia, although this did not stop the Blackhawk Singers from getting out and participating in community events. Lawrence shared that Denise started making the children regalia and that having the regalia gave them a sense of pride when they were dancing.

I spoke with former LNS Principal, Heather Leighton, about the start of the Blackhawk Singers and the correlation between the creation of the Blackhawk Singers and the Blackhawk Singer-students' academic success. She shared that the teachers within the school came to her and shared that the children that participated in song and dance with the Blackhawk Singers performed better in class and worked harder to keep their grades up as they knew that in order to travel to perform, they had to be in good academic standing. Teachers also shared that on days that children did not have song and dance, they seemed disconnected. When it was shown that there was a strong correlation between academic success and song and dance, the LNS began starting each day off with song and dance for all 7th-12th grades in the gymnasium. Every

morning from 8:00 -8:30 all students and staff would gather in the gymnasium and start each morning with song and dance. Those who decided not to participate in song and dance would still attend and observe.

As a part of this research, I also got to talk with the current education director, Dr. Lexie Tom about where the Blackhawk Singers are today at LNS. She shared her observation about the older Blackhawk Singers mentoring and teaching the younger kids about song and dance. She said it is amazing to watch them encourage one another to get out and participate. She shared they still do song and dance every morning, and they are always getting calls from outside organizations to have the Blackhawk Singers do opening remarks by doing song and dance at different events.

Lawrence reflected on originally only having five members, and when the last Paddle to Lummi happened in 2019, they had 70 children from the Blackhawk Singers there to perform during the protocol. The Paddle to Lummi was a special moment for the Lummi Nation as the families came together and decided to perform as one group for protocol. This was the first time in history that separate families would come together and share the floor.

I personally remember this moment and the honor and pride I felt as a member of the Lummi Nation to have so many youths on the floor dancing with pride. There was not any open space on that floor, and children were having to dance in place. I sat and watched from the stands and thought: our future is bright.

I share the story of the Blackhawk Singers as a case study because their experiences create a proven concept that when we give our children the opportunity within LNS to be exposed to different cultural activities our children can thrive. Not every child is fortunate to have a family that has access to language, song, dance, and culture that is needed to bridge that

intergenerational gap created by the impacts of colonization. If we can continue to explore ways to use the education system as a tool to help children build a strong self-identity by providing access to language, culture, and history, it will light their fire, and they will succeed.

Story Sharing Session Carlene Toby

My fourth and final story-sharing session took place via Zoom with Carlene Toby, who was the transitional coordinator at LNS. She worked within her role as the transition coordinator for the past eight years. I followed the same model as the previous story-sharing sessions by simply talking to her about my research journey and how I got to my pertaining to mentorship, transitions, and belonging. My guiding story-sharing session included the following question:

- What does transition mean to the Lummi Nation School?

I was very fortunate to sit down and speak with Carlene as she shared a lot of good information including gaps in the LNS transitions program framework. She stated that to qualify for the transition program you had to be around the ages of 14-15 and that only children with IEP and 504 plans qualified for “life skill services.” These life skill services include creating a transition plan to help students transition to adulthood. The assessment for both transition and gifted and talented are done by teacher observation.

Some of the obstacles with the transitions program include the age requirement.

Currently, the program does not have a plan in place to support young adults that are 18-21 years of age, she mentioned that the Ferndale School District did have a great model for life skills and transition for post-secondary students who have graduated. LNS is legally required to do transition-program student outreach for up to two years after a student graduates. As of right now, this is merely for data collection to see where students are and what path they are choosing after completing high school. Carlene was told that if someone needs services, LNS staff try to

help the transition-program student make connections, but LNS is not able to provide services – the check-in is intended only for data collection.

When I asked about ways LNS could improve the transitions program, Carlene said she had multiple suggestions based on observation. Even if a student had an IEP or 504, no consideration, measurement, or qualifier considered the student's mental health for things such as anxiety or depression even though there are some students with mental health concerns who could benefit from life skills support.

The teachers at LNS are spread very thin, as there is a shortage of teachers statewide. Since the pandemic, LNS has been utilizing an all-hands-on-deck approach, where life skills teachers are expected to fill in for academic teachers where needed. This takes away from the life skills teachers being able to provide the students with the transition support that is needed.

The last and most important takeaway from my conversation with Carlene was that she felt there was no community buy-in for the transition program. The fact that lack of community support was mentioned was in alignment with my overall research theme of creating community and ensuring relational accountability. When I asked Carlene if she could elaborate on what she meant by “community buy-in,” she said she felt that maybe the community didn’t think it was as important as academic classes or understand the need for transition plans and how they can support students transitioning to adulthood. In closing, she said, “LNS needs to look at what transition and decide what it is and why it’s important” (Toby, personal communication, 2023).

Analysis and Interpretation

Once I completed all the story-sharing sessions, I took time and transcribed my audio recordings. Listening to these recordings for a second time allowed me to hear themes begin to present themselves. Various themes were mentioned multiple times by all the participants. My

analysis and interpretation of what was shared with me reminded me of what Shawn Wilson shared in his book *Research is Ceremony*, “As I was listening, I was learning, and as I was learning I was sharing. It shaped the direction of the research and the results of the research in turn allowed for further analysis (p. 131).

It was interesting to me that although some of the participants were asked different guiding questions, they had some of the same themes appear, which I noticed through transcribing and coding. These themes included community involvement, the importance of Lummi values, indigenizing models, relationality, and early intervention. Analyzing these conversations and finding commonality will help create a model that ensures belonging, transitions, and mentorship at LNS.

Limitations

When it came to the limitations of this research, a few things contributed to the knowledge gained and shared within this dissertation in practice. The amount of time I had to take on a research question of this magnitude was the most significant factor in this research. For Coast Salish people, we moved according to the season. In the summer season, we moved according to where our fishing grounds were. In the spring, we were gathering fresh berries, and, in the fall, we were finding ways to preserve and prepare for the upcoming winter. In the winter, we were still and practiced ceremonies. I got approval to begin my research in November of 2022, our Coast Salish winter season, when we are to be still and engage in the ceremony. One of my limitations was not being able to include two of the participants I originally had in mind due to their winter schedule and ceremony obligations. The pandemic stopped the Coast Salish people from gathering for two years and this past winter was the first time our people were able to hold the ceremony and called for every weekend to be booked with longhouse naming,

memorials, and other ceremonies. This was a limitation for me as well, as I wanted to be fully engaged in ceremony all winter and being connected to our longhouse was something I felt I needed.

I would have liked to have more time to reach more participants to contribute to the area of belonging, mentorship, and transitions. Another limitation I faced was knowing when to be done. I felt like one research question led to five different paths and when I focused in on one of those paths, there were another five paths from that one path, and they were all connected in multiple ways. I had to take time to realize that this work will never be done and that I will spend the rest of my line advocating for educational sovereignty at LNS. I had to accept that this research is a small piece of a larger picture.

Chapter 5 Discussion

After sitting with the abundance of information obtained by both primary and secondary research within this three-year journey pertaining to the involvement and incorporation of community, belonging, transitions, and mentorship at LNS, I found myself attempting to connect the dots. I wanted to pay respect to the many stories shared with me and the themes that came forward through each story-sharing session while connecting them back to my research questions. For each theme, I will describe what is currently taking place, what barriers are presented, and how we can assert our educational sovereignty to create a model that fits our children's needs at LNS.

Belonging

The overall goal of enhancing student belonging and achieving the school's original vision is a multifaceted question with no one correct answer; it is a vision and destination we must always take steps toward. In my story-sharing session with George Swanaset Sr., he shared the importance of early education intervention in teaching tribal values. Although George never directly came out and said this, I felt like he was saying that children need to have a basic solid foundation of the tribal values and what it means to be Lummi before a child can be open to accepting gifts. Currently, there is no cultural curriculum nor standards for what is taught and at what age to ensure children are provided access to basic foundational cultural knowledge. I mentioned it above in the story-sharing session with Dr. Tom, but I will reiterate it as it pertains to the finding section as well. Dr. Tom shared a project she is working on expanding the cultural curriculum. Currently, various teachers are doing various projects with no clear goal or benchmarks for assessment. If they could create a culture curriculum that was in alignment with

the language standards, students could be exposed to a wide variety of knowledge with the plan of expanding and advancing each year.

The work of creating language and culture standards is a project that is currently being pursued by the LNS leadership. After reflecting, this initiative is also in alignment with the work mentioned in the literature review by Senator John McCoy and his work on Chapter 290, Laws of 2018, which gives State/Tribal Compact Schools the ability to implement culturally relevant curriculum and assessments. This law gives State/Tribal compact schools the freedom and capability to "replace, to the maximum extent permitted by state and federal law, statewide student assessments with locally developed assessments that are culturally relevant, based on community standards, and aligned with the Washington state learning standards" (65th Legislature, 2018). To successfully see this through, the legislative bill that was passed needs to come with financial support.

My recommendation for using education as a tool to help students create a sense of belonging is to create "language and culture" curriculum complete with standards and assessments at LNS. We can successfully see this through by asking the Lummi Nation to advocate and lobby on LNS's behalf to seek financial support and an extension on Washington State Senate Bill 6474.

Mentorship

After my conversation with Dr. Tom, I was able to get a picture of what is currently in place within LNS pertaining to mentorship. Currently, the gifted and talented program is an existing model that could be modified to fit the needs of the students. As mentioned above in the literature review, "Districts must define an educational program for Highly Capable students, and comply with specific program-related provisions that, integrated as a whole across the K–12

continuum, will deliver a comprehensive and equitable education for Highly Capable students” (OSPI, n.d.). Meaning that we at LNS have the freedom and flexibility to make this program what we need it to be for our students. I strongly believe that every student at LNS needs to have a specialized vision plan (IVP) that helps them be exposed to both cultural and academic advancements.

The barrier of community involvement and community buy-in was a barrier that was mentioned in the story-sharing sessions with both Dr. Tom and Ms. Carlene Toby. Getting community buy-in and community mentorship support reminded me of that story Dr. Tom shared with me during our session about a reoccurring incident that had been taking place with a group of the Blackhawks athletic team at LNS and bullying. The previous Principal, a Lummi tribal member, went out into the community and sought male mentors to volunteer to participate in a learning opportunity for the football team. Her vision was to have an overnight camping trip where the football team would paddle by traveling canoe to one of our sacred village sites within the San Juan Islands, chaperoned by elders and male mentors. The purpose of the trip was to help them work together while also teaching them the tribal values of respect, discipline, and determination. Trying to instill in them that we are one people, we need each other, and bullying is not in our way of life. The project was eventually stopped due to liability issues, but the number of male mentors and elders that came forward to help teach these boys about what it means to be a Lummi man was substantial. It is a proven concept that the mentors will come forward if you create the model, show the need, and reach out to the community in person. We must always remember the importance of relational thinking, and that we go out into the community and seek support and understanding that helping these children is our sacred obligation.

My recommendation for creating community buy-in and community support for a mentorship program that helps children identify their gifts and then master their gifts under the supervision of a mentor is to create and envision a model and then go out into the community and seek support by showing the need.

Transitions

Through the conversation with Ms. Carlene Toby, we looked at starting the conversation of “What does transition mean to the Lummi Nation.” Within the literature and the words from the late Elder, Ruby Peters, she explained transitioning from one stage of your life to the next as a ceremony. There were ceremonies that took place to ensure that spiritually those connections happened. I believe that this part of the equation will be more natural as we achieve the first two sections of “belonging”- the incorporation of language and culture curriculum/assessment and “mentorship”- expanding on the gifted and talented program and helping children master their gifts.

The current barriers mentioned were only being able to provide transition services to students who qualify for special education services. This needs to be expanded to a school-wide initiative. The other barrier that was presented was the limitations on follow up of children after graduation to ensure that they have been successful in their transitions into adulthood. If the child needs extra assistance after graduation, being able to have the resources available to help that young adult navigate adulthood is important. Our childrens’ successful transitions to adulthood are not simply data points. If they need support services to transition effectively, LNS should be allowed to provide or connect students with those services. I would also recommend seeing what “community knowledge” level of ceremonies could take place within the school to bring back the spiritual and cultural piece of transitioning from one chapter of their life to the next. The

vision is to look at the seniors stranding on the stage on graduation and know that as a nation we provided them the academic and cultural knowledge and tools needed to find their place within the village, contribute back to the community, and know within our hearts they have found *belonging*.

Future Findings

There is still a lot of research to look forward to as we continue to look at ways to achieve education sovereignty. These projects include but are not limited to *culturally relevant assessment and community-based standards, language and culture curriculum, culturally relevant mentorship program, and an Indigenous Leadership program*. I remind everyone reading this that these findings and research stemmed from one subject of achieving educational sovereignty out of eight themes. There is still so much research to be done, even on the seven other themes that were presented, which are equally important.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

If this story leaves you with anything, I hope it assures you that dismantling the colonizing systems is possible – and that we are a part of that social justice movement. I hope you find what lights your fire just as I found what inspired me. There is a revolution to assert our sovereignty and take control of our own education. As stated by Christi Belcourt:

“Educators are in a position with a great deal of power to effect change. You literally have the future of this country in your hands, especially if you are teaching children. You must have the courage to disrupt the system for the sake of our children and our grandchildren. You must rebuild, so schools cease being institutions and return to their natural state of bringing children to the land and providing mentorships to develop their gifts and be free thinkers. In this way, children will be able to find the solutions that we are not capable of due to our conditioning through colonization” (Tuck & Yang, 2018, p. 120).

There is so still so much work to be done within Education at the Lummi Nation and achieving education sovereignty. In the work of Brayboy and Tribal Critical Race Theory (TCRT), there was an emphasis on the importance of “action” understanding that “lumping together the variety of tribal problems and seeking demonic principle at work is intellectually satisfying. But it does not change the real situation” (2006, p. 440). Meaning that we can continue to research problems within our communities but if we are not implementing change or bringing solutions to the table, we are also a part of the problem. “There must be a component of action or activism—a way of connecting theory and practice in deep and explicit ways (Brayboy, 2006, p. 440).” By conducting research that pertains to educational sovereignty and identifying

barriers and finding ways to bridge the gap we are becoming a part of the solution. By envisioning a future at LNS that includes belonging, mentorship, and transitions, we envision a future that allows our children to build a strong self-identity of what it means to be Lummi.

This research is a small piece of a very large picture. There is still a lot of work to do when it comes to breaking educational barriers. Breaking these barriers begins by asserting our sovereignty as tribal nations. I reflect on my educational journey, with the hopes of finding the answers to solve all the nation's problems. Only to realize there they are all interconnected in a web woven together due to the impacts of historical trauma. We must heal the generations of hurt by empowering, building, and by envisioning an education system that allows our children to thrive. I reflect on my own educational journey and the words of Shawn, "If the research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right" (Wilson, 2008, p.135). One thing I know for sure is I am not the same person I was when I started....I am stronger, wiser, and have absorbed an abundance of knowledge. I have done the work needed to prepare myself to go within the community and give back. I am whole, complete, and belong. I have found my *gift*.

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