Reclaiming, Reframing and Recreating: Decolonizing Stories in one Collaborative Early Childhood Education Policy Effort

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Abstract

Opening pathways to higher education while still honoring the cultural identity of Indigenous students in early childhood education (ECE) is the central goal of this work. Enhancing ECE cross-cultural partnerships with Indigenous communities by decentering Euro-Western epistemologies across education systems is needed. This study explores the question: How do the stories of three lives come together in one Indigenous community in ways that inform policy for Anishinaabe children and early childhood educators? Building from a project developed across institutions and cultural contexts in the Midwest United States, Indigenous theory and duoethnography are used to interact in culturally sustaining ways. The process of connecting across cultural and political barriers reveals that representation matters; teachers who culturally and linguistically reflect the children they teach provide one possibility for recentering Indigenous knowledge. Articulation agreements, field experiences and cross-cultural courses for future teachers are created and begin to address credentialing needs of tribal members to teach in this Anishinaabe community PreK-12 school. By decolonizing our storytelling, we connect Indigenous identity with current ECE policy. The power of our work is not in a single story but in the intersections uncovered through sharing our stories.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge, Early Childhood Education, Representation, Duoethnography

Introduction

A Start to the Story (Dibaajimowin)

> Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen (Tafoya, 1995, p. 12).

The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated stark societal inequities at a global level. With race relations in the United States at a disturbing and critical point in our history, our ability to translate across racial and cultural lines holds power. This research considers the life stories of three faculty in early childhood education (ECE) and substance abuse support services when addressing issues of access for college students and staff across institutions of higher education and reservation settings. When exploring degree attainment for Anishinaabe community members and field

experiences for university students in early childhood education (ECE), the impact of life stories has relevance.

Background

The authors' friendship of 25 years began as insider/outsider across varied spaces including professional mentoring roles, travel companions, recovery groups, community theatre, and as local and distant community members. As an Anishinaabe woman, an Irish/Anishinaabe woman and a German/English/Irish woman, we represented different spaces on the colonization spectrum in the United States (US). Considering decolonizing methodologies, we share our most recent experiences as faculty -- two located in an Anishinaabe community and one in a rural predominantly white institution (PWI) in the US Midwest. We use the term "community" to depict the land, and people of the land, historically bound through US reservation policies and existing as a sovereign nation. Throughout our writing, our shifting identities and ability to translate for each other allowed for reciprocal access and, as the quote suggests, opened the possibility to listen and collaborate. Our work highlights the relative and fluid nature of power and the required complexity of qualitative research. We propose that thoughtful, respectful, and brave approaches become necessary to break apart and begin to address the dangerous dynamic of internal, as well as external, forms of colonization (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

We met in 1996 when Lucy moved north to teach at the Anishinaabe PreK-12 school where Thelma was the elder program coordinator and Dianne was an outpatient counselor for the tribe. After Lucy moved from the area, we stayed in touch across the miles and reconnected in 2011 more formally through our work focusing on education in the community. We were each acutely aware the teaching staff in the school did not represent the Anishinaabe community. As faculty, in an Anishinaabe community and a predominately white institution (PWI) in the United States Midwest, we shared our stories in hopes of building stronger connections across the communities and institutions in support of young children.

The authors (L to R) Lucy, Thelma and Dianne 2017

Prior to our research, and despite disparate backgrounds, we forged unique friendships. Moving towards the work and the storytelling was exciting and terrifying. Would there

be any interest in retelling the threads of our stories that led us to talk for hours about the needs of tribal students and the connection to teacher certification while centering Indigenous identity? These conversations were convoluted and filled initially, with reconnection about children, grandchildren, ceremony and spirituality, dissertation writing and graduate work, yet led to the research and were an integral part of our stories. Just, as the quote on storying defines the work, the circular nature also defines our shared relationships (Tafoya, 1995).

Partnerships, grants, and early childhood education initiatives with Indigenous communities are common. However, the temporary nature of the partnerships across communities and the fragmented support toward degree completion creates a frustrating situation for students who may complete years of coursework at multiple institutions, yet still lack the minimum credentials for a bachelor's degree and teaching licensure (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012). To enhance these partnerships by decentering Euro-Western epistemologies, the values underlying what is counted as scholarship, timelines and commitment are reevaluated. Increasingly, Indigenous scholars consider the impact of Indigenous epistemology in research and pedagogy to address the impact of colonizing structures (Sumida Huaman, Chiu, & Billy, 2019). Similarly, teaching Anishinaabe children in the home community in ways that do not repeat the past but seek to reclaim and recreate Indigenous identity is needed. In short, representation matters; teachers who linguistically and culturally reflect the children they teach centers indigeneity (Heimer, 2020). In our work, we uncover the process of connections across assumptions, wounds, misunderstandings, and structural and political barriers.

Our primary research question was: How do the stories of three lives come together in one Indigenous community in ways that inform policy for Anishinaabe children and educators? Using decolonizing theory, we came to have insights using "duoethnography" with an emphasis on *currere* for deep reading and analysis across shared stories (Pinar, 2017; Smith, 2012). Currere, the notion that our lives provide a curriculum that may be used as a tool, provides a way to operationalize our stories for deeper understanding of difference as it relates to privilege and oppressive practices in ECE. By decolonizing our storytelling, we inform the present and provide insight to plan for a future that re-centers Indigenous cultural and linguistic identity with current ECE policy. In the process, we expose continued dominance, prejudice, and control. Decentering Euro-Western epistemologies through ethnographic approaches is necessary to address the dangerous dynamic of internal and external forms of colonization.

Theoretical Framework

Centering Indigenous experience by decolonizing perspectives served as a framework. This approach recognizes colonization is in the present; it is not "over." These perspectives consider historical legacies of assimilation and colonization. Tuhiwai Smith shares:

> To acquiesce is to lose ourselves entirely and implicitly agree with all that has been said about us. To resist is to retrench in the margins, retrieve what we were and remake ourselves. The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices – all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope (Tuhiwai Smith,1999, p.4).

By focusing on our lived experiences across identity groups, we acknowledged and honored our individual, unique and shifting roles as both marginalized and hopeful

across time. In addition, by connecting notions of power, we shifted the dynamic in our work to recognize the too often decentered power in Indigenous voices, and placed the Indigenous knowledge base at the center of our research. As Tuhiwai Smith suggests Indigenous researchers have insider dynamics that require "sensitivity, skill, maturity, experience and knowledge," and non-Indigenous researchers are "ill-prepared" to support this process (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p.10). Our collaborative duoethnographic research seeks to prioritize the Indigenous discourse while not requiring strict adherence to Euro-Western research practices (Deloria, 1988; Habashi, 2015; Sumida Huaman, et al., 2019). There is an intermingling of voices and experiences in our research, and yet we seek to privilege the Indigenous researchers' knowledge. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) puts forth a call to deconstruct the power inherent in research practices and question whose interests we may best serve.

Similarly, Critical Race Theory (CRT), created out of Critical Legal Studies, considers the "relationship among race, racism and power" and places these relationships in the context of "economics, history, context, group- and self-interest," and include "feelings and the unconscious" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 2-3). Bell, as one of the first authors of critical race theory, included three major arguments: constitutional contradiction, the interest convergence principle, and the price of racial remedies. We focus on the notion of "interest convergence" suggesting whites, as the dominant racial group, will only support racial equality when it serves a greater good for them as well (Bell, 1987). In other words, while a policy, movement or initiative may appear to support a marginalized racial community, too often, in the end, the dominant group will gain a benefit, or interests will converge. Using CRT and interest convergence as analytical tools allows for consideration of more complex colonizing power relations. Who is being served in the collaborative programs being created and to what end? Often advocates start an initiative with the intention of creating equity, only to learn later they have continued to serve those in power (Apple, 2004; Apple, 2012).

As an example, in Wisconsin the American Indian Studies & Wisconsin Act 31 approved in 1989 stated that a "curriculum for grades four to twelve on the Chippewa Indian's treaty-based, off-reservation rights to hunt, fish, and gather would be created" (O'Connor, n.d., Slide 4). Implementation of the act has been erratic over the 32 years of existence. The intention of the legislature, to naturally integrate cultural knowledge and experience into a meaningful relevant curriculum, was unevenly enacted in classrooms across the state and too often simply "added on" to the existing inaccurate state history curriculum (Leary, 2018). As Treuer suggests, "We do not have to sugarcoat our history…we owe it to future generations not to lie to them" (Treuer 2012, p.32).

In this research, we explore how the stories of three lives come together in one Indigenous community across colonized/ing histories to illustrate the intersection of colonization and interest convergence. Our stories shifted over time and while labor intensive, the possibility emerged to reclaim, reframe and recreate our stories (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Lees, 2016). Writing this article, situated in one moment, presented challenges as our careers shifted, friendships evolved, and contexts radically changed. At the center was the question: How do the stories of three lives come together in one Indigenous community in ways that inform policy for Anishinaabe children and early childhood educators?

Duoethnography juxtaposes stories of the Other through life stories. Using duoethnography allowed us to decenter our voices for consideration of historical and cultural influences to highlight intersections in our policy work. In this research, the stories are situated among the trio; therefore, the strengths of the approach could be applied, but not limited to, the binary of self/Other. We found the use of Homi Bhabha's notion of the "third space" helpful. "By exploring the Third Space, we may

elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 39). Through our stories, intersections connected Indigenous, cultural, and linguistic identity with current early childhood education policy.

Given our changing contexts and the fluid nature of power, we applied our stories to our work with ECE teachers and teacher preparation. As we shared and reacted together to each other's stories, beyond our lived histories, a deeper level of vulnerability and trust was formed.

Duoethnography

Our methodology choice was a key factor in allowing us to dig deeply. Indigenous research methodologies have become more accessible and published using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as well as other approaches more directly linked to Indigenous tribes across the globe (Chilisa, 2012; Lees, 2016; Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017; Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003). In this research, we explore different ways of knowing across contexts through duoethnography, specifically the tenet of currere, or life as curriculum. Duoethnography provided an emergent approach in which we, as researchers, are the "site and not the topic" (Norris, Sawyer & Lund, 2012, p.13). We can learn about ourselves from the Other, and thus illustrate narratives of resistance to dominant discourses (Norris, Sawyer & Lund, 2012).

Using duoethnography, we explored the impact of the authors' long-term friendship, across varied spaces including higher education, urban and rural settings, and elementary classrooms. Our willingness to read across ethnic and colonizing boundaries using duoethnography allowed us to explore the goals of our work. These goals included opening pathways to higher education for all students, along with the fundamental expectation that the cultural identity of the Indigenous student would be honored. Specifically, as Pinar suggests, "Our life histories are not liabilities to be exorcised but are the very pre-conditions for knowing. It is our individual and collective stories in which present projects are situated and it is awareness of these stories, which is the lamp that illuminates the dark spots the rough edges" (Pinar, 1988, p. 148).

Building on this idea of currere to understand our educational practice, we began the journey of storytelling toward deeper insight. Researchers using duoethnography have certain dispositions, principles and foci, referred to as "tenets." The nine tenets of duoethnography: 1) currere, 2) polyvocal and dialogic, 3) disrupts metanarratives, 4) difference, 5) dialogic change and regenerative transformation, 6) trustworthiness found in self-reflexivity, not validity and trust claims, 7) audience accessibility, 8) ethical stances, and 9) trust were relevant to our work. Four of these tenets were most powerful. The tenets we applied included currere (life as curriculum), polyvocal and dialogic data, disruption of metanarratives of dominance and universal truths, and trustworthiness. This methodology is "participatory, dialogic, and non-prescriptive," which allows for open interpretations, but also illuminates the power in difference across contexts (Norris et al., 2012, p. 12).

Currere

This tenet of duoethnography, while philosophically most daunting, was the most exciting for us to consider. "Currere is an act of self-interrogation in which one reclaims one's self from one's self as one unpacks and repacks the meanings that one holds. Duoethnography does this in tandem with the Other" (Norris, et al., 2012, p. 13). Through currere, we present our lived experience as data. Duoethnography was expanded to include life stories of the three authors. Through our stories, intersections complicated the idea of the self/Other binary.

Within the concept, Pinar divides the methods of currere into four steps: regressive, progressive, analytic, and synthesis. In the regressive phase, we revisit and reflect on our past. In the progressive phase, we imagine the future; and through the analytic phase we explore how each past moment is reconsidered in the shifting present moments to consider the future within particular contexts. Through synthesizing this process across time, the intent is to act anew in the world. (Baszile, 2017; Pinar, 2017). This process aligns with ancient Anishinaabe teaching to look forward (some call it looking ahead seven generations) to make sure there is land, food, and education for the generations yet to be born (Loew, 2015).

Polyvocal and Dialogic

Applying this tenet, we kept our experiences separate in our data. Allowing our voices to stand alone provided keen insight on intersections in our stories. The intersections highlight both common and diverging opinions. In other words, by noting direct quotes, we keep the stories separate. However, sharing across three lived experiences allows for dialogue that in turn informs connections to our work together as educators. This dialogue functions "as a tool to elevate consciousness of self and others" (Norris et al., 2012, p. 14).

Disrupt Metanarratives

As authors we understood that not one position (author) claims dominance or universal truth. At the center, our identities as colonizer and colonized illustrated this tenet. "By juxtaposing the solitary voice of an auto-ethnographer with the voice of an Other, neither position can claim dominance or universal truth" (Norris et al., 2012, p. 15). As we each deconstruct and reconstruct our individual memories, we are called to think critically and "act with some degree of humble uncertainty" when telling our stories (Norris et al., 2012, p. 17). By disrupting the metanarratives, the intersection of our professional and cultural identity came to light. This notion of humility aligns with Anishinaabe teachings that one person cannot know everything. We learn from each other and it is important to listen as well as speak (Treuer, 2012).

Trustworthiness Found in Self–Reflexivity

Using this tenet, we read stories as fluid and ever changing as they "transform over time" (Norris et al., 2012, p. 20). Therefore, there was no one truth to compare our stories to, rather there were multiple truths and knowledge bases. This approach allowed for a deeper level of trust, as we were not seeking one universal truth to defend. This was particularly helpful as we considered power dynamics attached to colonizing.

Methodology

Context and Data

This multi-ethnographic study spans over 25 years of relationships with three authors. Our lives intersect both professionally and personally. Our positions in education shifted over time as our friendships waxed and waned depending on geography, family, and life circumstances. At the center of our work was a desire to better understand how to connect across differences. Our research question was created out of a collaborative teacher education project we were developing together. The research focused on ourselves, our biographies, and the educational context of our study. In the Implications section we bring our stories together with insights for teacher education and students' futures.

Participants

As an Anishinaabe woman born and raised in the Anishinaabe community (Thelma), a half-Irish Anishinaabe woman raised in "bear" territory, but Chicago bear territory (Dianne), and a German/English/Irish woman raised in the Midwest (Lucy), we represent different spaces on the colonization spectrum. Therefore, centering the work on colonizing identities was key when taking into account the historical legacy of assimilation and colonization. Our outward appearance (the race/nation/tribal label) impacts how we are perceived as powerful or powerless, which shifts across our contexts. We acknowledge the color of our skin carries with it definitions that vary among us as our skin tones are socially constructed as "race." Our research and writing connect us beyond these labels. Our histories and stories illustrate more powerful intersections that provided new ways for using our individual power.

Process

"Up north" is the genesis of our friendship. The circumstances that brought such unlikely women together was perhaps the Creator's plan. In all our dissimilarities, our faith is probably our strongest link to each other. Up north is where we all have a spiritual connection, a place we carry with us to stay grounded to the earth, to the work we do, and to our friendships with each other. Though doubting our importance, every time we presented at conferences and shared our stories, we were encouraged to carry our messages forward. And so, we did keep moving forward. Lucy packed up the car with two girls, a dog, and gear and headed four hundred miles north to write and share memories. Thelma and Dianne -- one who can't see at night and both hate "city driving" -- leave early in the morning to get to the destination before dark to talk about the meaning of our stories. The emotional vulnerability was raw, surprising, and brought the three of us into each other's lives in an intimacy we did not foresee (Behar, 1997). It was messy, the title didn't fit (walking in two worlds, shifted to multiple worlds, to reclaiming, reframing, recreating), but we were willing to show up and grapple with our roles.

We each had our own perspective on how the work would proceed. Bridging long-standing friendships and relationships between institutions, particularly at the Tribal College, Dianne as a Board of Regents member, and Thelma as faculty at the time, brought awareness to the possibility of working together to engage tribal students to pursue teacher certification. Lucy secured a state grant to support articulation work that helped financially support the travel and we rotated hosting each other, up north and at the University location.

Data and Coding

As Lucy and Thelma both incorporate self-reflection and identity work in their college classrooms, it only made sense to start with our stories. We agreed to write stories of our lives that impacted who we are today as educators and advocates for access and equity. We wrote and read to each other over a writing weekend, and then paused to reflect individually. We independently wrote three stories centering on 1) our childhood, 2) experience in education, and 3) our work together as advocates for all children. Each of us selected personal photos we felt told the story of phases of our lives. These nine stories provided the data to read across, and connect to, the more functional outcomes toward advocacy for children. Following the writing process, each author read her story to the other two researchers during another writing workshop weekend. We let time pass after this interaction, as these were intensely emotional stories.

Next, we independently read across the stories and pulled out key themes (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013; Stake, 1995). The themes included: 1) resilience, 2) role as

educator/teacher, 3) role as mother/woman, and 4) uncertainty, fear, and pain. Initially we used the four tenets of duoethnography-- 1) currere, 2) polyvocal and dialogic, 3) disrupting metanarrative, and 4) trustworthiness -- to understand the process of writing and sharing toward synthesizing moments (currere).

We re-read the stories and independently coded excerpts using the four themes. We inserted (via word tracking) comments of agreement or challenge for each other. This process was both empowering and frustrating as we were hesitant to critique another's story, or our own, as interpretation can be fluid (trustworthiness). In the end, we agreed to accept ideas to inform our work from different constructed identities (Anishinaabe, hybrid ethnicity, white, etc.). We then compiled the themes and read across the stories by themes (resilience; educator; woman/mother; and uncertainty, fear, and pain). In the process, we discovered the power in connection, rather than feeling constrained by socially constructed labels. While this was a strength for the research, lost was the ability to share our complete stories as poetic and profound.

We recognize the pressure to "fit" our research into a Euro-Western structure in the hopes of reaching a broader academic audience. Taking the time and expending emotional and physical energy to show up to face the trauma of the past through sharing stories in person, and using technology, allowed us to forge connections through barriers. These barriers included: 1) the turnover of administration at the community college, PWI university, PreK-12 schools, 2) successful and unsuccessful partnerships with other schools, 3) shifts in funding and support, and 4) the overall low threshold of understanding among our communities. Our trust and support of each other was tested during the writing process, though the primary concern for lack of trust was outside our small team. Key intersections were gleaned as we read across the data, including the ability of each author to walk in complex worlds (Styres, Zinga, Brock, & Bomberry, 2010). This insight is then applied in the Findings, Discussion and Implications sections.

Intersections/Findings

In this section we highlight the use of trustworthiness, disrupting metanarratives and polyvocal sharing to connect across stories. Currere is employed throughout, but mostly within the regressive phase -- considering our past (Pinar, 2017). As we consider the future in the progressive phase of currere through the sharing and commenting together, we move into the analytic and synthesis phases. Using this methodological approach, the themes of 1) resilience, 2) educator, 3) mother, and 4) uncertainty, fear, and pain are explored.

Resilience

We noted resilience in childhood as one point of intersection, in spite of fears, adversity, poverty, and family issues. Both Dianne and Thelma offered numerous examples where resiliency played a key role.

Photo 1.1 Dianne's family, 1980, mother in the center for 10th sobriety giveaway feast. Dianne is seated to her left with her arm around her.

> Dianne: My uncle said I was not *part* Indian. "What *part*? You are Anishinaabe, that is all that matters. You do belong here, and so does Mike *(Dianne's son)".* Of course, he (my uncle) was right. Only the Creator has the right to judge whether I am "good enough."
>
> Thelma: What troubling thoughts must have crossed her mind as she (my mother) worked to provide food and shelter for her family, laboring late into the nighttime hours, fashioning trinkets to sell for food and clothing.
>
> Thelma: I realized, after starting this journey into the history of my people, that I might find myself amidst all the chaos and suffering, but because of the resilience of the Anishinaabe to hold fast to their beliefs and ways of being in spite of the efforts of assimilation and colonization by the American government, I was able to engage.

Although of similar lineage, Thelma and Dianne's experiences were distinct, and yet offered legitimacy to the complexity of one single identity as Anishinaabe. Though sharing a significant connection through historical legacy, their paths are unique. Applying the trustworthiness and polyvocal tenets allowed us to appreciate the complexity of the colonization experience in our own lives. Though both spiritual Anishinaabe women, Thelma and Dianne bring complex "remembering" in this regressive phase of currere. Lucy brings in her experience from fourth grade as it relates to a sense of self and belonging.

> Lucy: When I was nine, we moved to a new state. In my memory, I enter the classroom. I sit down, and something seems very different; it slowly sinks in, I am the only white girl in my class. I sit here now and try to remember the details of the new class decades ago, and this is what I know: I felt as if I was in a bubble. I could not figure out what happened. All of a sudden, I was alone, different. There was not one other person in my new world that looked like me.

Lucy's position in the world shifted as her context changed, moving from a predominantly white suburban setting to an African American urban neighborhood and school. While dramatically different, this sense of belonging, or questioning belonging, was woven throughout our stories as resilient experiences. Lucy as a dominant culture member had freedom to move in and out of settings requiring resilience. Putting aside our desire for a universal knowing through trustworthiness, we stumbled upon an ironic connection through "difference." This also illustrated the need for creating a third space fostering hybrid identities (Bhabha, 1994).

Photo 1.2 Lucy's 8th grade graduation in her neighborhood school. Lucy is back row center.

Educator

Each of us, on some level, is disrupting metanarratives of the educator. Dianne questions, "Who is considered an educator." Lucy questions, "Who is the expert?" Thelma questions, "Whose pedagogy is valid, valued, and why."

Photo 1.3 Two fourth graders in the Anishinaabe community. The photographer, the teacher, Lucy, as seen through the eyes of the students.

> Dianne*:* Even these painful stories of self-discovery are ones I shared with kids struggling in treatment to define who they are and where they belong. Living their whole lives on a reservation, they look for faith and a sense of belongingness. We are so convinced the answers cannot be that easy. And they are that easy.
>
> Lucy**:** "First, do no harm." This is far easier said than done. I came into my teaching as a listener. I came into my work having already been humbled early in my life. Teaching was *my* choice, my passion, and I was a fallible human. How do I avoid the role of the savior that was handed down through my family? Elders joined my classroom; they sat and listened, and yet I was sensitive to being the center of attention. I was painfully aware that I was different – tall, white -- leading the class of Anishinaabe children, and yet I knew I was a learner and desperately wanted to listen. It was hard for me to accept my role as expert, as I was a novice teacher, and these were elders carrying wisdom. I later learned these elder women were taught (perhaps through colonization) to "respect the expert." Together we negotiated this new space of learning.
>
> Thelma: The students, ten- and eleven-year-olds, sat quietly at their desks, and, as the student teacher, I began the discussion and presented the assignment about a social studies unit. As I waited for a response from the group, I walked silently to the back of the room to see how individual students were doing. In the back row a delicate young Anishinaabe girl sat reading intently from an open book, and she did not hear me approach her desk. As I peered over her shoulder, I saw that she was reading a comic book that was placed discreetly on her textbook. Under the observant gaze of the teacher who stood nearby, I slammed the book shut, and said quietly, "I am so disappointed in you." Later, I found the young girl crying in the bathroom. For many years remorse has filled my memories of this time in my life, all because I publicly reprimanded this young girl in order to seek approval from my cooperating teacher. Anishinaabe teachings are kindness, love, and humility, and this was not the "Indian way." This episode shaped my way of teaching forever.

In our work, Dianne questioned her credibility as an educator in her role as a drug and alcohol prevention specialist, where Lucy and Thelma were past classroom teachers and now college education faculty. Given freedom to explore identity in hybrid spaces illuminated new ways to connect across identity markers.

> Dianne: Our roles as teachers and educators through the years, together and apart, has been quite a journey. The gifts of self-doubt, seeing students "get it," learning and making changes have kept us in the classrooms and therapy rooms for longer than we sometimes feel effective. This continues to be *our* choice because we have things to share for those teachers and educators coming up.

Though seemingly divergent, these examples show how our professional areas of focus intersect through our passion, personal connection, and commitment to acknowledging the translation of difference for children and educators in the Anishinaabe and extended community.

Mother

Photo 1.3 Thelma off camera right holding one sibling. The group of children is extended family, 1964.

Our matriarchal lineage was pronounced throughout our storytelling.

> Thelma*:* My mother often sat up alone after putting the children to bed, doing beadwork or reading to the light of a kerosene lantern. I lay awake, thinking pleasant thoughts and feeling so warm and safe, as the beautiful woman worked late into the night. Her dark hair framed her face, her strong hands creating a delicate pattern of beads on the leather, all this remains in my memory. Little did I consider how much weight was on her shoulders, as she struggled to provide for her family, during the times of poverty and hunger.
>
> Dianne***:*** I was a single parent with a 3-year-old child and running *to* the reservation, for me, it was the only thing that could save my life and the life of my child
>
> Lucy**:** At the center of my life on all levels is the child, my own, and the proverbial child.

These quotes, attached to longer narratives, illustrated the power in the role of mother for each of us, while contending with labels and discrimination. Thelma's mother employs survival skills, selling sacred artifacts crafted through generational knowledge systems. Dianne, as a new mother, feels safest and seen in the arms of her extended family, yet denied the respect from external dominant culture members. These stories are juxtaposed with Lucy's privilege to identify as a universal mother, yet she is lacking a sense of belonging to the community. While intersecting as mothers, our lived experiences define a hybrid space for intersection and learning (Bhabha, 1994).

Fear, Uncertainty & Pain

The use of polyvocal approaches and dialogue was most helpful. Reading across our stories with each other heightened the emotion, and we were required to pause and listen to each voice.

> Dianne*:* I began to doubt my worthiness in belonging and fitting in. I questioned whether I deserved what they had because of my skin, the freckles, and the hazel eyes that set me apart, even from my own family members. I remember feeling ashamed about "being Indian enough" to ask for my name, attend those Big Drum ceremonies with my mom and son, and later the Midewiwin lodge. I viscerally recall the first time I prayed in a sweat lodge, asking for guidance, health and healing for my family and felt that Someone was listening.
>
> Lucy**:** After reading some of my college students' stories regarding identity and race, I want to pull back into that shell I found as a nine-year-old. Such overwhelming pain, loss, grief in our worlds and I wonder, should I do this? Should I ask students to delve deep into their experience to revisit what has been, simply to better understand themselves in the context of others? Is this fair?
>
> Thelma: The metallic sound of a rattle and the heavy beat of the water drum sliced through the tranquil night air, pounding to Ojibwe words and songs. These were sounds of a Midewiwin funeral for my sister's stillborn baby. I was frightened. The minutes ticked by like hours as I waited for my mother's return! Children are discouraged from attending funerals, so my sisters and I were left at home while my mother attended the ceremony. Although my grandfather's house was just a few hundred yards away, it could have been a million miles away, and I was sick with fear! The sounds were those of death and black darkness.

Thelma and Dianne both share deeply emotional memories, while Lucy questions the practice of delving deep in the classroom with college students and whether it is "fair" to uncover wounds from the past. Given our theoretical framing and desire to understand the phases in relationships with regard to currere, we knew our work was important to model for other researchers, teachers, students, and community members. The connection to multiple conceptions of our colonizing history and the politics of memory was highlighted for us in relation to fear and uncertainty (Boym, 2001). For Indigenous and formerly enslaved African Americans, our historical legacy of genocide and slavery is an open wound. Lucy had begun the currere analysis and synthesizing phases by questioning her practice of centering the pain of the past in the classroom with undergraduate students at a PWI. For those experiencing oppression, acknowledging the pain of the past is not about choice, it is a lived reality. The idea of fairness is problematic as it assumes the dominant position. Our stories suggest

resilience, connection, and pain offer hope. It is in the denial of our history that the wounds fester. The idea of hybridity as it applies to historical events was helpful:

> It is precisely in reading between these borderlines of the nation-space that we can see how the concept of the 'people' emerges...The people are not simply historical events or parts of a patriotic body politic. They are also a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference: their claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address (Bhabha, 1994, p. 145).

The fluid nature of self as historically shaped and yet presently thriving, was highlighted through writing, reading and revisiting our stories and interpersonal struggles. Doing so, we exposed continued dominance through microaggressions, prejudice and control. Exploring our research question: How do the stories of three lives come together in one Indigenous community in ways that inform policy for Anishinaabe children and early childhood educators? We begin to break down the structural barriers, such as access to higher education, and develop a heightened awareness across cultures of future teachers regarding the disturbing effects of colonization on children and families.

Discussion

As we revisit the goals of the study to explore pathways to higher education honoring the cultural identity of Indigenous students in early childhood education (ECE), the quotes below illustrate crossing multiple worlds and contexts of knowing – culture, academic, linguistic, and racial. The power in story brought us to the research and we stayed with it through three college presidents, staffing cuts, deaths in the community, and the politics among us. We stayed and continue to stay for the one college student transferring into a bachelor's program, the seven college students immersed in the Anishinaabe community, and the hope for recognition of our painful historical intersections that got us to this moment.

Crossing Worlds

> Dianne*:* All those years, I prayed the rote prayers in church on my knees, however, I had never had that feeling (that someone was listening). It was comfortable, but it was not comforting.
>
> Lucy*:* That Friday before the Anishinaabe Community school opened for the year, I met with the administrators and was told that I would teach 4th grade, not Kindergarten. It did not hit me until the conclusion of my first year of teaching that I was teaching children who were the age I had been when my entire sense of self shifted – my racial awakening. Was this a universal joke or divine synchronicity? Regardless, it was my path.
>
> Thelma: My story is much the same as many of my ancestors, a blend of uncompromising belief in traditional Anishinaabe values and the need to achieve according to the dominant society.

Placing our histories through storytelling, in relation to each other, and using the lens of colonization, highlighted our varied levels of access to education and policy. By delving into our own experiences as colonizing and colonized educators, we were able to connect across political, educational and personal communities highlighting stories from the past of elders in the classroom, administrative frustrations as principal,

prevention education, and family histories. Using currere brought to light connections. Our analysis allowed us to work through the past and reimagine a future together in the form of writing, presentations and policy. At the center of our research is our love and respect for each other as a source of advocacy and action. As Bhabha suggests,

> We are no longer confronted with an ontological problem of being but with the discursive strategy of the moment of interrogation, a moment in which the demand for identification becomes, primarily, a response to other questions of signification and desire, culture and politics (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 49-50).

Dianne and Thelma had moments of denial of their Anishinaabe identity. Microaggressions -- such as being "eyed" in stores or more overtly being told by a best friend on the bus, "I wish you could spend the night, but my mother doesn't allow Indians in our house" -- live in them today. Following the research methodology and sharing our stories together illuminated the connection from prejudice to oppressive practices and, as Thelma notes, to achieve according to dominant society.

Using duoethnography, especially currere, allowed us a "third" space, a hybrid space to honor lived experiences as they inform our identities (Bhabha, 1994). We are an amalgam of self and employment of, or resistance to, social, political, cultural and historical influences. Thelma and Dianne share Anishinaabe community connections, and yet divergences in their experiences were discovered. Lucy's lineage as colonizer highlighted the requirement to listen, learn and join as co-conspirator to address the "slow death" caused by the impacts of colonization and creation of systemic racism (Love, 2019).

Indigenous and non-Indigenous colonizing identities were at play, and as we worked, our hybrid natures were exposed through the intersections of experiences. The roles provided power in different contexts and required our willingness to walk in worlds as the vulnerable observer (Behar, 1997). We suggest awareness of our resilience, roles (educator/mother), and connection to our fears/uncertainties is required when considering crossing worlds (Styres et al., 2010). The stories alone are not the focus. Our research process provides a model for future work in early education policy and illustrates reclaiming (writing the stories), reframing (sharing and clarifying the stories) and recreating (using our insights and varied roles) our policy collaboration.

Implications

We model critical reflection modifying currere through autoethnographic research offering insights into our lives to create a new paradigm for "being." This is in resistance to Euro-Western influenced research paradigms which are often linear in nature. We reclaim, reframe, and recreate our perspectives based on our stories, analysis, and writing. In this process, we connect the past to inform the present and plan for a future that engages Indigenous cultural and linguistic identity with current education policy specifically for teachers of young children (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Pinar, 2017; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). As Brayboy cautions, "We make decisions about the future based on a flawed past." Our work seeks to avoid this pitfall (Brayboy, 2013, np).

Our research question explores the stories of three lives coming together in one Indigenous community across colonized/ing histories. During this process, the impact of additive policy for Anishinaabe children and preservice educators illuminated how interest convergence impacts Indigenous communities. The intentions of policy can shift in ways that fail to address issues of equity in education. Too often education policy has been "added on" or ignored using dominant Euro-Western discourse and;

therefore, fails to address the depth of the history, and continues to serve the interests of the dominant culture (Bell, 1987). How might we instead center Indigenous knowing in early childhood policy?

Students in a Tribal Community College ECE cohort developed curriculum units that incorporated Anishinaabe knowledge and values with course specific objectives. This curriculum offers one path to sharing a more accurate history. Zhaawanikwe (Dolores) is an assistant teacher who has engaged in early childhood curriculum college classes. Yet, as a first speaker of the Anishinaabe language who grew up in the "bush" in Canada, Zhaawanikwe addresses the policy conundrum of Act 31 in Wisconsin by beginning with ways of being (language and culture) and adding on the pedagogical methods, rather than starting with the standards or policy and adding on culture. Adding cultural approaches, rather than centering Indigenous ontology, is a global issue. The work of Kōhanga Reo (Indigenous language nests) in Aotearoa/New Zealand and more broadly through texts re-centering Indigenous cosmologies to explore human/non-human relationships seek to re-center indigeneity in educational practices and policies and function as strategies to push back on colonial influence (Skerrett, 2017; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2019). Policy creation is a first step, and the inclusion of impacted populations (in our work Anishinaabe/Indigenous) is required for determining whose interests are served (Sumida Huaman, et al., 2019).

We feel a sense of urgency -- there is danger in continuing with additive policy as it ignores the strengths of our histories. The need to re-center varied ontologies is required if we are to consider hybrid spaces honoring our past (the continuum of violent to romanticized images) to recreate, not erase, the strengths of our languages and culture. Our policy work continues as ECE future teachers from Lucy's university travel north to live, work and learn within the Anishinaabe community. In the spring of 2016, four students completed a practicum in PreK-3rd grade classrooms at the PreK-12, lived within the boundaries of the reservation, and took an Introduction to Ojibwe Culture course with a faculty member who is Anishinaabe. By applying a reflective process, and using currere within duoethnography, the students have a deeper sense of "free intellectual pursuit, spiritual growth and critical consciousness" (Baszile, 2017, p. vii). This work continued years after the experience through reflection, research and writing, culminating in a published article and book chapter with students and the Anishinaabe faculty in 2020 (Heimer, White, Caya & Lancaster, 2020).

Through sharing our stories, we expose continued dominance, prejudice, and control. We begin to break down the structural barriers, such as access to higher education, and aim to heighten awareness across cultures for future teachers regarding the disturbing effects of colonization on children and families (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Part of the success in our work is judged by the provision of more pathways for Anishinaabe students, staff, and community members to pursue additional education and certification in the field of early childhood education. However, the notion of measurement and success is varied across cultural lines and continues to exist within a dominant Euro-Western structure.

Working together with the community college staff and administration and with the support of the Deans in the school of education, we created articulation agreements. The agreements provide students from the ECE program at the college within the Anishinaabe community an opportunity to continue with the university and obtain the bachelor's degree in ECE. In tandem with this marker of success, and more relevant to our discussion in this paper, we worked on the creation of a hybrid format ECE bachelor's degree. The bachelor's degree would provide greater access to a wide range of teaching jobs within the Anishinaabe community.

Finally, the college within the Anishinaabe community plans to develop a bachelor's degree in ECE centered on Indigenous language and knowledge systems. The university wrote a portion of a grant to support this work as faculty at the PWI had academic cultural and social capital. The Anishinaabe faculty centered relevant, sustaining and revitalizing Indigenous early childhood education programs. Combining these strengths, aspects of identity, and systems of capital create the hybrid third space for connection (Bhabha, 1994).

Using Indigenous theory and ethnographic approaches allowed us to honor different ways of being and interacting in culturally sustaining ways (Bang & Marin, 2015; Paris & Alim, 2017). In giving up safety and pride, we better connect in humility and love and create change for equity. Decolonizing our storytelling, we inform the present and provide insight to plan for a future that re-centers Indigenous cultural and linguistic identity with current early childhood education policy.

The power in our work is not in a single story, but in the intersections uncovered through sharing our stories. "Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen" (Tafoya, 1995, p. 12).

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