Implementing Indigenous Studies Curriculum: Case Studies of a Complicated Curricular Process

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Abstract:

There are many different modalities and attempts to combat settler colonialism in K-12 education; however, in practice, many of these efforts to include Indigenous history, contemporary presence, and culture have triggered a shifting material and discursive resistance. This leads to an inference that the sedimented curricula of settler colonialism cannot be thought of only in terms of textbooks, state standards, and lesson plans. It necessitates being thought of as a series of complex agentic assemblages involving communities, habits of thought and feeling, career anxieties, and more. These protean assemblages of material and discursive forces actively erase opportunities for Indigenous truths, lives, and futurities to find purchase in educational spaces. What does it mean to teach future educators to prepare themselves to engage with the whole of these dynamics, not simply the ideas that are left out of the mandated school curricula? This research engaged in community work with the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, worked with culture bearers and discussed non-human agency through a Siletz lens.

These shape-shifting assemblages of material and discursive forces actively erase Indigenous truths, lives, and futurities. Therefore, learning to teach against the grain of settler colonialism requires preparing teachers to engage with the whole of this dynamic, not just the ideas left out of mandated school curricula.

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Author's Note

This dissertation topic comes on the heels of a series of lived experiences of mine, many of which involved efforts to teach mandated curricular subject matter and engaging with the complex, protean, and often imbricated ways in which settler colonialism reasserts itself in unexpected ways in educational spaces. Although this piece focuses on implementing a local Indigenous-centered curriculum, this is not an isolated case; similar things occur across what is now known as Oregon, the United States of America, and North America as a whole. In this author's note, I share some of the experiences that brought me to this research topic and have influenced my experiences in the academy thus far.

I share these experiences to acknowledge that this topic did not emerge from a purely theoretical interest in curriculum studies, non-human or more-than-human agency, or survivance. It is, rather, the direct result of a series of encounters with the profound and often disquieting distance between educational policy as written and curriculum as enacted. The stories that animate this portion of the work are my own. The dissertation has built on this work by speaking with tribal leaders, community members, and educators. This author's note, however, draws on my career as a classroom teacher, a time when a profound hope met a complex education in the mechanisms of silence, deflection, and resilience within systems of schooling.

I was wrestling with where I was willing to teach, I wanted to be close to my family and home community to support the people I cared deeply for, but saw there were not currently any roles available that fit my skill set, suddenly I found myself recruited by an Indigenous principal who spoke powerfully about the need for Native educators to model academic success for Native students, I returned to my home community in Oregon. I arrived eager to contribute, especially

because Oregon had just passed Senate Bill 13 (Tribal History/Shared History; SB 13), a legislative mandate designed to rectify the erasure of Indigenous peoples from K–12 education. I was excited to have secured a social studies teaching assignment at this moment, when the state required K–12 schools to teach the history and present lives of Oregon's Indigenous communities and directed the Oregon Department of Education to address that erasure in curricula. I believed I was stepping into a place ready for this necessary work.

The narratives that follow chronicle my gradual realization that a mandate alone changes very little. The "pernicious curricular silence" about Indigenous lives is not a passive void but an active, maintained condition. It is sustained through administrative deflection, which recasts systemic responsibility as an individual teacher's burden; through surveillance, which mobilizes community anxieties to enforce colonial norms; and through distributed networks of support, which can be accessed to create pockets of transformative practice.

My plan was to take an intergenerational approach in several of my lessons. If we were going to study the history and present lives of Oregon's Indigenous communities, my students would have direct access to those communities and to people who knew local history and contemporary life in the Siletz Nation. Through this intergenerational work, I also hoped to connect my coursework with that of my fellow high school teachers, especially in English Language Arts (ELA) and science. As I pursued those collaborations, however, I learned to my surprise that many of the teachers I worked alongside had not heard about the passage of SB 13 or its implications for their subject areas. They were not opposed, simply uninformed.

I knew the state provided professional development resources to address such gaps. Yet after asking around, I saw no indication that the district or my school building would take steps to meet the new state requirements, even though we had a large Native youth population. I brought this concern to the principal/superintendent and asked whether the school would prepare for the rollout of the Tribal History/Shared History mandate and how I might help. I did not expect this to become a source of strain. I was surprised, then, when the principal/superintendent told me that SB 13 was not currently a district priority. Instead, the superintendent asserted that teaching about Indigenous communities, history, and culture was the sole responsibility of the Social Studies Department (me) not the whole faculty. I pointed out that this was not what the new legislation mandated; it explicitly directed administration to support teachers in all subject areas in developing curriculum that included Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing. It would not be difficult, I added, to include Indigenous perspectives in a unit or two in science and English classes. I knew people who could offer professional development to support this work. I said I would be willing to do it if necessary. This response, recasting a systemic mandate as one teacher's individual burden was an early instance of the administrative deflection that would shape the narratives that follow.

The principal/superintendent waved the offer away. He doubted that an Indigenous lens could fit subjects like science. Whether I was being naive or simply willful, I kept pushing. I pointed to the Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) movement and to current work already being done in the field. He remained unconvinced and seemed increasingly irritated that I was not taking the hint. He said he had not heard of such work and asked me to provide examples of how it might appear in the high school curriculum. It felt less like an invitation than a procedural way to table the proposal. I left the conversation disappointed.

That exchange deserves attention. Hundreds of people had lobbied the state to pass SB 13 (Tribal History/Shared History) precisely to break a pernicious curricular silence. Their work mattered. It interrupted the policy silence, generated curricular materials about Indigenous history and presence, and may have emboldened some teachers to attempt more Indigenized curricula. But the curricular silence did not simply disappear. A hundred miles from Salem, it remained intact and it proved capable of absorbing the very advocacy that had produced the mandate.

Complying with the state mandate, which I came to understand, was not mainly a matter of producing curriculum. The lessons and materials already existed. What required the most labor was moving through a vague, unspoken disinterest in and a steady deflection of Indigenous inclusion. That resistance never stayed put; it kept taking new shapes.

Later that year, the resistance changed form again, this time becoming active and insidious. I was in the middle of a three-week unit on the American Indian Civil Rights movement, designed to complicate static depictions of Native culture and to emphasize the fluid, ongoing nature of Native identity. Part of that work involved introducing Vizenor's (2008) concept of "survivance" alongside examples of contemporary Indigenous art. During the third week, in the middle of a lesson, a phone call was patched directly into my classroom. We had been told this would happen during class only in an emergency affecting students' health or safety, and the students understood the same. I stopped teaching and took the call.

It was not about a student. It was a summons to meet with the principal. When I asked what the meeting concerned, the office manager replied, “You’ll see when you get here.” I said I would come during my preparation period. She told me to come immediately and said a stand-in would cover my class.

I learned that members of the community had complained about the American Indian Civil Rights lessons. The principal then told me that, going forward, I would submit detailed, structured lesson plans for administrative approval, and that I would change any curriculum that community members had raised concerns about or that the administration believed would create strife in the wider community. I assured him that I could justify every element of my teaching, its accuracy, its alignment with state standards, its age appropriateness, its role in the larger unit, and the skills it helped students develop. But there was no provision for recourse, justification, or counter-proposal. The call itself had already done its work: it converted a lesson into an emergency, a teacher into a suspect, and community anxiety into an instrument of surveillance.

The surveillance that began with that phone call soon acquired a specific pretext. When I asked which parts of the curriculum had offended community members, I learned that during the previous week a student had described our discussion of the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee by American Indian Movement (AIM) activists to his parents. The lesson had also referenced Leonard Peltier, an imprisoned Ojibwe activist and AIM leader later convicted of killing two FBI agents. The student’s guardian then called the principal, claiming that my curriculum carried a political agenda and calling it “anti-American.”

That accusation did more than challenge a single lesson. It functioned as what Calderón (2014) terms a colonial palimpsest: an act that reinforces the premise that because education has

always been delivered in one way, it must continue to be performed that way. In response, the administrator made easing the guardian's distress his highest priority. His own career concerns may have been at work. Principals have no labor union and rely on the School Board's goodwill to remain in their positions. In a small town, a majority-white board composed of local citizens who speak regularly with community members can turn a single complaint into a much wider mobilization of resentment. Whatever his reasons, he did not support a curriculum that at times centered local Indigenous community priorities and perspectives, one that unsettled taken-for-granted settler futurities. Instead, he tried to compel a return to habituated avoidance of Indigenous perspectives in local and U.S. history, thereby insulating settler futurities from displacement or change.

The difficulty I faced was not what is traditionally understood as curricular. I had the knowledge and the lesson plans. Nor was I contending only with one administrator's vague deflections. Those deflections were expressions of something more distributed, a social phenomenon entangled with local personalities and politics, with institutionalized career ladders, with pervasive white fragility, and, quite possibly, with national social media campaigns that framed inclusive K–12 curricula as a threat to the nation.

The third and final story was closer to the end of the year, when I built a lesson on Two-Spirit persons. Several juniors in my social studies class identified as Two-Spirit and had been fielding questions from classmates and faculty about what the term meant. Rather than leave them alone to carry that educational labor, I brought the topic into the curriculum. Marie Laing offers a formulation that holds together the term's necessary fluidity and its communal grounding: "Two-Spirit is rooted in the fact that there are common experiences that we have as

Indigenous people whose genders and sexualities are deemed ‘other’ by cis-heteropatriarchy; thus, having a word to describe those commonalities while also leaving room for our differences helps us communicate and build community” (pp. 22–23). The unit introduced examples from multiple cultures in which third-gender roles or gender fluidity emerge, the Tenino term Waxlha, the Takelma Xa’wisa, and the Assiniboine Winktan, among others (Indian Health Service [IHS], 2022). It also opened onto intersectionality more generally, inviting students to reflect on the overlapping identities they themselves inhabited.

By then I still submitted lessons to the principal, though as far as I could tell he had stopped reviewing them. That did not make the topic any less precarious. “Two-Spirit” is a distinctly Indigenous conception, not easily trivialized or collapsed into Eurocentric categories of sexuality and gender identity. And after the earlier pushback over Indigenous perspectives in U.S. history, I was aware that teaching in ways that also unsettled heteronormative futurities could invite another form of resistance. The concern was not whether the material was sound; it was what the material might set in motion.

The lesson plan was meticulously worded, mapped onto several state social studies standards, and then I contacted my union representative about a conflict I sensed might be coming. After I explained the situation, her assurance was unambiguous: this was precisely the kind of curriculum the state was striving for, and she saw no reason the subject matter itself should provoke strife.

Comforted but not quite at ease, I went ahead with the unit. No students pushed back. Those who identified as Two-Spirit came up to me after the first lesson, excited, and told me they were grateful the topic had been given room in the classroom. They carried some of the

materials to other students and faculty they trusted. Over the following days, questions arrived (from fellow teachers, from students in other classes) and they were substantive. It felt constructive. I began to feel hopeful about how knowledge of this subject might grow across the school community.

The week of the unit passed without incident, and I let myself relax. Then came a call in the middle of an early class. I assumed it was the office manager or the principal, but the voice on the other end was unfamiliar. Without preamble, the caller began interrogating me about what I taught, eventually accusing me of pushing a "gay agenda." It took me a moment to realize I was speaking with a parent, and that the front office had forwarded the call straight into my classroom mid-lesson. I told them I was glad to talk but was currently teaching, and that they needed to go through proper channels. When they ignored that and kept pressing, I hung up. Not long after, the principal called and asked me to come to the office at my earliest convenience. During the next break, I called my union representative, printed my lesson plans, and headed over with the paperwork in hand.

His welcome was warm, almost disarming. He asked how the lessons were going and how students were responding to both the content and my teaching style. I answered honestly: good on both counts, and the background I shared with many students had deepened the rapport between us. He nodded, then leaned forward. "Do you know who I just got off the phone with?" I said I had an idea, since the office manager had routed a call into my classroom while I was teaching. His eyebrow rose. He asked a few pointed questions about the Two-Spirit and intersectionality unit.

I did not sense personal hostility toward the topic. What I sensed was his dislike of angry parents calling his office. Rather than describe the unit aloud, I took the lesson plans from my bag and set them on his desk. I told him I had consulted the union before teaching it and would gladly answer community questions at an appropriate time, though not during the school day. Then I said I needed to leave so I would not be late for my next class. I added that I believed the lesson offered something important, not only to students at our school who identify as Two-Spirit, but to nearly everyone else who wants to be supportive and does not know how. He said nothing. He only looked tired.

This last story reveals yet another layer at which the curriculum was being made during this time. What shaped my teaching was never only my own knowledge of subjects like Two-Spirit identities. Nor was it only the opposing assemblage[1]: community members alarmed by the content, a principal exposed to their discontent, the politics of a white-majority rural school board, and settler-colonial and heteronormative discourses operating locally and globally to suppress curricula centering Indigenous history, lives, and values. Alongside that assemblage ran

[1] I use the word assemblage to refer to complex relational phenomena involving divergent ontological elements (e,g, ideas, affects, discourses, economics, etc.) that cohere in some often self-replicating manner and that often demonstrate agentic qualities (Bennet, 2010; Mazzei & Jackson, 2017). The contemporary usage of this term in the social sciences can be traced to the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2009), though not without some controversy (Buchanan, 2016; Nail, 2017; Weheliye, 2014). The first concern is that the term is often used too loosely, to refer to any collection of materials and processes. Here my usage of the term is more consistent with Ian Buchanan's (2016) view that "the assemblage is a 'living' arrangement…the assemblage is purposeful, it is not simply a happenstance collocation of people, materials and actions, but the deliberate realization of a distinctive plan "abstract machine" (p. 385). The second concern is the philosophies associated with the term have been used in a manner that reinscribes settler colonialism and Indigenous cultural genocide either by uncritically celebrating colonialist expansion, extraction, and abstraction (Byrd, 2011; King, 2017; Todd, 2016), by ignoring the way Indigenous thinkers have long presumed the existence and significance of a variety of forms of non-human agency (Rosiek, Snyder, & Pratt, 2020; Watts, 2013), or by insisting on the ideal of subjectless social analysis that disallows arguments grounded in the experience of identity-based oppression (King, 2017; Weheliye, 2014). I am aware of these critiques and find them valid, yet like many still find the term useful (Honeyford & Watts, 2020; Nxumalo, 2021; Weheliye, 2014) and explicitly use it in a manner that critiques colonialism, acknowledges Indigenous theories of more-than-human agency.

another, and it was generative. The Teachers Union stood behind me. Indigenous activists were rewriting state standards and policy. Queer-positive political movements, broad and diffuse, had already made room for the questions I was asking. Because I knew how to find these formations, how to cite them, and how to draw on their backing, their influence entered my classroom in concrete ways.

And then there were the students. Their engagement, in discussion, with materials, across assignments, was not incidental to the curriculum; it was part of its material and affective texture, arguably its most vital part. They were embedded in families, community networks, online spaces that nurtured their personal and political identities, and in relation to one another. Through my daily interactions with them, all of those connections pressed on what I taught. Had I not been listening when they talked about their lives, had they not told me they identified as Two-Spirit, had I not taken that seriously, the unit on Two-Spirit gender would most likely never have existed. In that sense, the students and the web of relations they carried with them authored part of that week's curriculum.

When I began talking with other Indigenous educators, I was looking for commiseration. What I found instead was a pattern. The details shifted from place to place, another administrator, another loophole, another pressure point in the community, but the arc was unnervingly consistent. Settler knowledge reclaimed the center. Indigenous presence drifted back to the margins, named in principle and avoided in practice. Those conversations did more than console me; they turned private irritation into a research question. What animates these varied pushbacks? What links efforts that look unrelated but converge on the same curriculum? Why does the silence keep returning in the same shape?

These episodes are not simply my stories. They are places to examine curriculum as something lived, contested, and relational. Curriculum, I came to see, is assembled as much by an administrator's exposure to complaint, the calculus of a local school board, the long residue of settler colonialism, the bravery of students, and the visible and invisible networks of resistance and solidarity teachers must learn to read. Standards and lesson plans matter, but they are not the whole machinery.

I offer these accounts as data, not as a list of injuries. They unsettle what "implementation" means when the goal is to center Indigenous knowledge and futures. The hardest work was never the unit itself, though the unit mattered. It was navigating the charged terrain of relationships, power, and history that makes a school. This project thinks with and through that complexity, holding both the struggle and the possibility that lives inside ordinary teaching.

The theoretical framework developed in the chapters that follow does not begin in abstraction. It begins here, in these experiences. Read together, they reveal curriculum as a formation shaped by policy, place, affect, and relational networks, and they sharpen the central question this study pursues: why does inclusion, even when mandated, so rarely unsettle the settler-colonial logic that organizes schools?

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> *Invisibility of whiteness and settler society is a feature of settler colonialism, and support for Indigenous students must necessarily recognize this unmarked backdrop against which some Indigenous students may try to express themselves. Care must be taken to encourage Indigenous students to interrogate the ways they represent their heritage and pride; but care must also be taken to make visible the ways settler society normalizes particular (white) bodies, rendering them Indigenous only when adorned with beads, buckskin, or feathers.*
>
> - Leilani Sabzalian (Alutiiq/Sugpiaq), 2019, p. 99

Despite significant legislative progress in states such as Oregon, Montana, Arizona, Hawai'i, and several others, to mandate the inclusion of ethnic and Indigenous studies in K–12 curricula, the practical implementation of these mandates faces sophisticated, adaptive forms of resistance. This chapter introduces the central problem of the study: that the mere "truth-telling" of Indigenous history is insufficient to dislodge the deeply sedimented hegemonies of settler colonialism in schools. While mandates like Oregon Senate Bill 13: Tribal History/Shared History represent a crucial step toward educational justice, the transition from a planned curriculum to an enacted curriculum reveals that settler colonialism is not a static historical legacy but a protean, agentic force that constantly reorients itself to maintain the status quo. This introduction frames the research within the tension between policy intent and classroom reality, arguing that current teacher education models, which often view curriculum as a static set of facts, fail to prepare educators for the complex political, affective, and material assemblages they will encounter. By centering the inquiry on the enacted curriculum and the split-second decisions teachers make in the face of resistance, this chapter sets the stage for a new theoretical framework that treats curriculum as a living, dynamic entity shaped by both human and more-than-human agents.

The need for teaching the full, complex, and often violent story of America has never been more urgent, nor has it found itself more heavily contested than at the crossroads we now face. While there is loud backlash against BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ history, there is also a revolution unfolding in classrooms across the country, attempting to forge a new approach to teaching. States like California, Montana, Arizona, and Oregon are paving the way for other states to begin weaving ethnic and Indigenous studies into educational standards (Sleeter, 2011). This shift is fueled by brave educators seeking opportunities to find, create, and implement a curriculum that helps their students feel seen, as well as by brilliant scholars hoping to develop powerful new resources that center the voices of those who are missing from the canon and have been historically pushed to the margins (Hannah-Jones, 2021; Schmitke et al., 2020; Valenzuela, 2016).

Two primary reasons are most frequently cited for pursuing such curricular initiatives. First, they aim to improve educational opportunities and learning outcomes for Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian American, and other students of color. There is evidence that courses reflecting students' identities and communities generally increase students' academic engagement, thereby increasing their graduation rates and other positive educational outcomes (Sleeter, 2011; Bonilla et al, 2021). Second, the content of this curriculum is considered beneficial for all students. For example, Indigenous peoples are part of local, national, and world communities. Civics education, therefore, should educate all students about Indigenous nationhood and survivance so they can be prepared to engage in an informed manner when such matters arise in the public sphere (Sabzalian et al, 2021).

Passing a state policy, however, is only the first step. The real challenge begins in the classroom. In practice, "inclusion" often becomes a form of domestication and assimilation. It provides "a glimpse into an ethnic community, rather than a challenge to the mainstream values and goals of schooling" (Marker, 2006, p. 503). Under a blanket of "diversity," Indigenous truths

can be stripped of their power, becoming just another item in a settler-colonial acquisitiveness (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). Such appropriation does not acknowledge the need for transformation of settler-colonial ideologies, epistemologies, and conceptions of reality required for genuine inclusion of Indigenous presence and perspectives. The work of this more substantive inclusion is also political, organizational, and intellectual, but it is far less centralized than the passing of a standards policy. It is more place-based, often improvisational, and dependent on the character of the school community and on the preparation of individual educators trying to implement the curriculum.

In navigating the complex assemblage of the classroom, where policy, place, affect, and agency collide, it is crucial to clarify our point of entry. This work focuses intently on curriculum, which I understand fundamentally as "what is being taught" (Rosiek & Kinslow, 2016, p. 13). My concern, however, is not with the inert script of official standards or textbooks. Instead, it centers on the dynamic, living reality of the enacted curriculum, "the outcomes and understandings that are enacted in classrooms" (Rosiek & Clandinin, 2016, p. 294). This is the crucial terrain where abstract mandates and truth-telling intentions meet the agentic forces of the school ecology. The enacted curriculum is what materializes in the split-second decisions, the resisted or welcomed digressions, and the relational currents between teacher, student, place, and ideology. It is here, in this enacted space, where educators either welcome or shift away from discussions around power imbalance, settler colonialism, Indigenous futurities, or survivance.

This deeper work is messy, personal, and place-based. It depends on the school, the community, and the preparedness of each educator. In the flow of a lesson, a teacher makes countless split-second decisions: when to reframe a discussion, when to push students deeper, when to shift focus entirely (Hayles, 2017). These choices shape the enacted curriculum, influenced by everything from classroom dynamics to the unseen, more-than-human agents of a place (Hatch & Rosiek, 2024; Marker, 2018).

Consequently, we must move beyond a simple "truth-telling" model of teaching. It is, of course, essential to break silences and share counter-stories. But the idea that exposing students to hard truths will dissolve the grip of racism and settler colonialism is naive. These forces are not static; they are protean, shifting, and reasserting themselves in both material and discursive ways. Teaching is not a matter of revealing a truth that then sets everyone free.

This leads to a crucial question: If truth-telling alone is insufficient, what framework better prepares teachers to navigate this complex terrain? We must start by reimagining curriculum itself within teacher education programs.

We must stop seeing curriculum merely as a set of facts to be delivered. Instead, we should understand it as a living assemblage—a dynamic mix of political pressures, institutional mandates, community emotions, and national myths that actively works to maintain a status quo. Settler colonialism within schools is not a passive backdrop; it is an agentic force that constantly adapts to recenter settler futurities.

Therefore, preparing teachers requires more than giving them strategies for political blowback. We must abandon the heroic image of the lone teacher-missionary who transforms lives through sheer will, a fantasy that ironically mirrors settler-colonial ideas of progress.

Instead, future educators need an expansive understanding of curriculum that reaches far beyond lesson plans. They must learn to build sustainable, relational networks, connecting with community knowledge, alternative Indigenous futurities, and supportive structures. Their agency must be as fluid and responsive as the settler-colonial logic they challenge.

The goal is not just to implement content but to foster a counter-agency. This means preparing teachers to engage in a long-term, transformative practice where they understand the school itself as a site of constant negotiation. They are not just purveyors of information but

navigators of a complex ecosystem, building a bulwark from which to thoughtfully refuse settler futurities and make space for Indigenous presences, epistemologies, and futures to thrive.

This expansive view of curriculum as a living assemblage reshapes what it means to teach. If the classroom is a field where agentic forces of settler colonialism and resistant futurities interact, then teaching becomes a form of ecological practice. An educator is not just a disseminator of knowledge but a careful observer and facilitator of relationships between students, ideas, history, place, and the more-than-human world.

Within this practice, the concept of "error" transforms. In a truth-telling model, a misstep is factual inaccuracy. In an ecological, assemblage-oriented model, a more critical error is a relational rupture, a moment where the teacher, often unconsciously, reinforces the extractive, hierarchical logic of settler futurity. This could be presenting Indigenous knowledge as a static artifact of the past or steering a student's challenging question back toward the comfort of a predetermined "learning objective." Preparing teachers, then, requires training in relational attunement, the ability to read these subtle currents and make choices that nurture counter-hegemonic connections.

This leads to the vital role of land and place as co-teacher. The current standards-based push, while important, often remains abstract. A truly transformative curriculum must be grounded. It requires asking: Whose ancestral land is this school on? How do the local waterways, plants, and animals tell stories of coexistence and displacement? This is not a one-day geography lesson but a continuous orientation that positions the school community within an ongoing story of place. It directly challenges the settler-colonial logic of land as property or backdrop by reinstating it as a primary, agentic source of knowledge and relationship (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015).

Furthermore, teacher education must confront the affective economy of schools. Settler futurity is not upheld by facts alone but by powerful, often unspoken, feelings: the comfort of a progress narrative, the anxiety of white fragility, the institutional fear of parental complaint. Future educators need affective preparedness. They must be equipped to sit with the discomfort their teaching will generate (in themselves, their students, and their colleagues) without retreating. This means moving beyond debate-style discussions that can entrench positions and toward pedagogies of embodied witnessing, deep listening, and speculative dreaming that can hold complexity.

The goal is to foster what we might call "futurity-building" alongside critique. A curriculum against the grain must do more than deconstruct it must actively help construct alternative possibilities. This involves centering Indigenous and Black speculative fiction, community-led restorative justice practices, and land-based projects that are not just about understanding the past but about practicing different ways of being in the present and future. This means shifting students from consumers of a settled history to engaged participants in shaping a contested present.

For teacher education a necessary shift may be to reframe success. Success cannot be measured solely by test scores or flawless lesson execution. It must also be gauged by the strength of the relational networks teachers build, their capacity to navigate affective storms, the alacrity with which they recognize and counter settler-colonial reassertions, and their skill in creating classroom ecologies where multiple, just futurities can be imagined and felt. This is not a curriculum to be covered but a lifelong, collective practice of ethical presence—a commitment to staying with the trouble and doing the slow, diligent work of weaving a different educational world, thread by relational thread.

Beyond "Truth Telling"

The idealized image of the educator as a courageous "truth-teller" remains a powerful archetype in social studies. In this narrative, a teacher, armed with accurate histories and suppressed perspectives, counters colonialism and racism by providing students with the missing pieces of the story. The implicit hope is that exposure to these truths will, through a kind of cognitive correction, loosen the grip of hegemonic narratives. While breaking curricular silences is an essential and non-negotiable starting point, this model is fundamentally incomplete. It treats the classroom as a neutral space awaiting factual correction and underestimates the complex, often visceral, deflections that emerge from student skepticism, parental pushback, and institutional anxiety. In practice, the truth-telling approach can be oversimplified and even counter-productive, leaving educators unprepared for the reality that disinformation does not dissipate like morning fog when challenged. The fog, more often than not, fights back.

Therefore, this is not a call to reject truth-telling, but we must move beyond an exclusive reliance on it. The critical question becomes: What understanding of curriculum and teaching can equip educators to work against a constantly shifting and resistant system? We must recognize that the social studies curriculum exists within a dynamic assemblage—an interconnected web of Eurocentric national myths, legislated standards, institutional policies, individual comfort levels, and the material-discursive machinery of settler-colonial power in schools. This assemblage is not a passive backdrop, simply awaiting the arrival of teachers with better facts—an approach akin to a limited politics of recognition. Our collective experience in schools, from individual classrooms to district-wide policy battles, demonstrates that these colonial systems actively resist. They writhe, adapt, and rebel against efforts to normalize multiple perspectives, employing strategies of co-option, domestication, and outright rejection to protect established narratives and futurities.

We have become persuaded that these curricular hegemonies are not static. They are protean and agential, possessing a reactive vitality that demands more than a revelatory

pedagogy. To prepare teachers for this reality, we must shift from a framework of delivering counter-narratives to one of navigating and engaging a living, resistant ecosystem.

This work draws on Tribal Critical Theory and narrative inquiry to explore this shift through a concrete, sobering case: my experience as an Indigenous educator teaching in what seemed like an ideal setting. I returned to teach in the majority-Native community where I was raised, under Indigenous leadership, with a mandate to enrich the curriculum with the histories of my students' ancestors. This context should have been fertile ground for a dynamic, heteroglossic Indigenized curriculum. The expectation was one of support and enlivened engagement.

Things did not turn out that way.

The narratives that follow detail how, even in this ostensibly supportive environment, the settler-colonial assemblage manifested in unexpected and powerful forms. Resistance emerged not from overt opposition but through the subtle, agentic pressures of bureaucratic procedure, conflicting community expectations shaped by generations of assimilationist schooling, and the pervasive, internalized logics of standardized education that discipline both teachers and students into compliance. This experience shows that the challenge is not merely a lack of truth but the active, often invisible work of a system that seeks to neutralize, appropriate, or exhaust transformative efforts.

- Diagnose the assemblage: To see the school not as a container for lessons but as a living network of forces (policy, space, tradition, emotion) that actively shapes what knowledge is allowed to "stick."
- Develop relational endurance: To build the skills for navigating the affective storms (of guilt, defensiveness, conflict) that truth-telling unleashes, not as a distraction from the work but as the very terrain of the work.

- Practice strategic network-building: To abandon the unsustainable "lone hero" model and learn to consciously weave networks of support and counter-agency within and beyond the school walls, understanding that individual will is fragile against systemic resilience.
- Enact curriculum as ecological intervention: To design pedagogical work that does more than transmit content but that deliberately intervenes in the classroom ecology, shifting relationships to place, fostering speculative dialogue about futures, and building a collective capacity to hold complexity.

The story of our "ideal" setting's unforeseen resistance is not a tale of failure but a crucial map of the real struggle. It reveals that preparing teachers for anti-colonial work is less about furnishing them with a canon of truths and more about apprenticing them in the arts of ecological navigation, relational fortitude, and strategic solidarity. The goal is not just to tell a different story but to cultivate the conditions, within themselves, their classrooms, and their communities, where that different story can truly take root, survive, and ultimately transform the very ground of learning.

With these power structures and various assemblages of national identity, individual comfort levels, and community affect in mind, we must question the structure of teacher education programs. If the reliance on "truth-telling" is insufficient, then what is our alternative theory of change? We must first allow for the reimagining of curriculum, and the role that curriculum and curriculum theory plays in our teacher education programs. Rather than limiting our understanding of curriculum to a set of facts and concepts or integrating understandings, separate from the dynamic social and political processes that endorse and reassert the significance and importance of certain kinds of learning, we must take strides to understand that settler colonialism is not simply passively awaiting our interventions: it is constantly shifting, reorienting and reasserting itself to recenter settler futurities. Therefore, our interventions need to

view all of these things as the assemblages they are, with the coherency of maintaining a status quo within K-12 education.

Trying to interrupt the hold settler futurities have on public school curricula and preparing teachers to do this work requires understanding settler-colonialism as a complex, imbricated assemblage and to develop an understanding of counter-agency by encouraging our future teachers to connect with and develop a relational network of different institutions structures, social connections, and connections to place and ideas that are sustainable over a longer course of time.

These agentic assemblages of settler colonialism are constantly asserting and reasserting themselves into academic spaces future teachers will inhabit. They should be made aware of how hostile these spaces can be. They need to understand that it is not enough for teachers to know the truth about Indigenous history and tell that truth to their students when schools are spaces in which those truths are not always welcomed. Future educators also need to be prepared to navigate the social and institutional pushback that emerge when settler futurities defend themselves. This requires building relationships with alternative Indigenous futurities, futurities that actively promote Indigenous epistemologies, metaphysics, and cultures. It is not a practice that is additive but rather transformative. The possibility of an agency that runs counter to that of settler colonialism makes possible a complex network not simply waiting to respond but one that is always in place and operates with the alacrity and fluidity to match the assertions of settler colonialism itself.

Teacher education programs should not reduce the work of providing teachers with strategies for dealing with the political blowback that arises when challenging settler futurities, as if the inclusion of specific curriculum content were one thing and the material and affective

work of navigating school politics were separate. Instead, future teachers should learn an expansive understanding of curriculum itself that reaches beyond the classroom, discrete content knowledge, and even hidden curricula. As such, teachers would be better prepared for the work required when refusing settler colonialism in schools if they understood curriculum as a complex set of material, political, and affective relations of which knowledge claims and learning objectives are a small part.

Teacher education programs also need to move away from the image of an individual arriving in a school with the idea of implementing curriculum materials that, upon execution, will transform students' lives. This view is unrealistic and shares far too many features with settler-colonial missionary fantasies of progress and uplift. Instead, an inclusive view of curriculum encourages and names aspects necessary for responding to pushback, community connections, and understandings of an expansive curriculum that engages with something beyond themselves and positions them within a complex bulwark that allows them to do the work of refusing settler futurity. Because these sedimented ideas of curriculum, roles of teachers, and dreams of settler futurity are not dispelled or displaced easily, they evolve and actively resist alternative futurities and visions of living and learning in our schools.

Clarification of Terminology: Force, Agency, & Assemblage

In this study, force refers to the capacity to affect and be affected before it consolidates into a recognizable actor or intention. Force is the affective and material pressure moving through a meeting, a classroom, or a policy document: anxiety, resentment, hope, institutional habit, and political discourse. It was not necessarily directed by a single person, but it shaped what felt possible.

Agency refers to the enacted capacity to make a difference within a given situation. Agency could be human or more-than-human, individual or distributed. It appeared when forces gathered into action, such as a teacher adapting a lesson, a board member redirecting debate, or a policy document constraining what counted as curriculum. Agency is therefore not the same as force. Force was the pressure or intensity, agency was the capacity to direct, resist, or redirect that pressure in a particular moment.

While the definition allows for more-than-human agency, it does not capture the fullness of what many Indigenous scholars mean by agency. In Indigenous ontologies, non-human agency is often understood as: Relational and reciprocal. More-than-human beings are not simply entities that make a difference; they are relatives, community members, and participants in a web of mutual obligation. As Watts (2013) argues, "Non-human beings are active members of society. Not only are they active, but they also directly influence how humans organize themselves into that society" (p. 23). The definition's language of "capacity to make a difference" is compatible with this but does not convey the relationality, reciprocity, and ethical obligation that are central to Indigenous understandings.

Many Indigenous scholars describe non-human agency in terms that exceed the minimalist language of "capacity." Deloria (1999) speaks of spirit; Garroutte and Westcott (2013) describe stories as living beings; Marker (2018) describes landscapes that "name themselves" and "use human beings to enact self-naming." These are not simply capacities to make a difference; they are forms of personhood, will, and purpose that Western frameworks often struggle to accommodate. Liberatory rather than loss-framed. As the dissertation itself notes, Western theories of non-human agency often frame it as a loss of human autonomy or free

will (Barad's "lack an independent, self-contained existence"), while Indigenous cosmologies frame these relationships as liberatory, additive, and reciprocal. The definition as written does not signal this distinction. The definition is intentionally broad and minimalist, but it means that the definition may not fully capture what is at stake in Indigenous conceptions of agency.

Assemblage refers to the relational arrangement through which forces circulated and agencies emerged. An assemblage was not a fixed group or a single thing. It was a heterogeneous gathering of bodies, affects, discourses, institutions, materials, and histories that produced particular capacities and effects. In this project, curriculum and settler colonialism were both understood as assemblages. They gathered parental affect, administrative anxiety, political rhetoric, institutional power, and conceptions of curriculum into a coherent pattern that could silence Indigenous-centered teaching. At the same time, the assemblage also contained counter-agencies that supported a more robust Indigenous curriculum.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The inclusion of Indigenous studies content in K-12 curricula faces many challenges. There is often a lack of professional development and outreach. Teachers cannot teach mandated curricula when they have not heard about it and/or lack the knowledge to effectively deliver it. Other factors also play a role. Even when educators are aware and prepared to teach the material, inclusion efforts often trigger what can best be described as a protean response of social and material resistance, or an insistence from some community members on teaching only curricula that center settler colonial perspectives and futurities (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013; Harjo, 2019; Hatch & Rosiek, 2024; Johnson & Jacob, 2022). This pushback often takes unexpected forms (e.g., calls from angry parents frustrated that their children have questions). It often comes from unexpected sources (e.g., administration/community members that show an initial interest in Indigenous curriculum but grow frustrated when education changes.)

This leads to the inference that both the curricula of hegemonic settler colonialism and curricular counter-narratives grounded in Indigenous experience and Indigenous studies scholarship are determined by more than just what is printed in textbooks. They are influenced by more than what is listed in state standards. The lived or enacted curricula (Aoki, 1993; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2019) is shaped by local communities, habits of thought and feeling, political activism, related hidden curricula, educator access to information, career anxieties, visions for the future, and more. These influences on curricula are not static but move and evolve in response to changing conditions; therefore, curriculum itself is constantly moving, adapting, and evolving.

To analyze these complex and fluid curricular processes, this study draws on three major sources for its theoretical vocabulary. The first of these will be Siletz ways of knowing. Siletz

epistemologies and cosmologies understand the world as an entanglement of human and more-than-human relations, many of which operate unnamed and are instead taught indirectly through lessons in youth. These lessons emphasize relationality and reciprocity with the human and non-human elements of our community. In Siletz cosmologies, non-human community members are neither lesser nor greater than humans but instead are valued non-hierarchically for their distinct qualities and character.

The Siletz community is small; consequently, no extensive academic literature is grounded in Siletz traditions. Therefore, a second source of conceptual vocabulary for this study will be contemporary curriculum theory. This study both draws upon and offers an intervention into contemporary curriculum studies, one that can help it support interventions like the Tribal Histories/Shared Histories policy in Oregon. The third primary source of ideas that inform this study is the Indigenous studies literature, specifically methodological literature that focuses on: a) storytelling/narrative as a method of analysis and theory-building; b) place-based ways of knowing; and c) non-human agency.

Curriculum Theory: The Five Turns

Curriculum theory has historically been organized around a series of orienting "turns" (or frameworks, if you prefer) that each reframe what curriculum is, what it is for, and who (or what) it involves (Pratt, 2021). These turns are not strictly chronological stages but rather persistent and overlapping traditions of thought, each responding to the limits of the others.

These frameworks are typically introduced as discrete categories, each anchored in its own scholarship and foundational assumptions. The borders of these frameworks are not static nor impermeable; there is considerable overlap, and the borders of the literatures are more fluid

than often presented. Each paradigm offers a different answer to the question of what matters most to teach.

These are not laid out in chronological order, but in a thematic frame, although some predate and, in essence, were displaced by others. None of these frameworks, in their most familiar formulations, were developed with Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, or cosmologies in view. None were designed to disrupt settler colonial futurities. The oldest and most enduring curriculum orientation treats curriculum as the organized transmission of disciplinary knowledge. Rooted in a scholarly or academic tradition, this turn holds that schooling aims to initiate students into the structures, methods, and canonical content of established subject matter fields. The curriculum is, in effect, the disciplines made teachable.

The foundation of this turn was the 1893 Committee of Ten report in which scholars, such as Ralph Tyler (1949), called for the standardization of disciplines in high schools throughout America. Joseph Schwab (1978) supported this organizational approach, arguing that disciplines are distinct because each is grounded in a unique theoretical framework. E.D. Hirsch (1988) extended Schwab's framing of disciplines by assembling a list of topics he considered essential knowledge for all "Americans." Although Hirsch's list has received severe criticism and now looks quite dated, the premise that certain texts and understandings are essential for a sense of national unity remains widely accepted.

For this research project, scholar academic theory is significant because it is the framework that most readily confines Indigenous studies to a single disciplinary container (typically social studies) and thereby restricts its capacity to transform the curriculum as a whole. When SB 13 is implemented as a set of discrete social studies lessons, scholar academic theory makes this segregation appear natural and sufficient. The interdisciplinary character of

Indigenous knowledge, the way that stories, land, science, and sovereignty are inseparable from one another, is rendered illegible when the curriculum is divided into distinct subjects. Subject matter based curriculum theory produces an additive rather than transformative curriculum, allowing schools to check the box of Indigenous inclusion without unsettling the broader disciplinary architecture that has historically erased Indigenous presence.

A second turn in curricular policy and practice emerged forcefully in the early twentieth century. The social efficiency turn reframed curriculum as an instrument for meeting the practical needs of society. Curriculum was to be scientifically designed to produce efficient workers, responsible citizens, and socially adjusted individuals. This turn is closely associated with the technical, product-based models of Tyler and Taba, which centered on objectives, content selection, and evaluation as a means of aligning schooling with societal demands. Taba and Tyler's framings differ in that Tyler's model is a deductive approach, focusing on a top-down framing, arguing teachers act as implementers who follow a standardized syllabus; Taba argued a bottom-up model, in which teachers build curriculum based on classroom situations as they arise.

Franklin Bobbitt is considered one of the key figures of this turn, arguing that what students needed to learn was not content, but instead skills. Curriculum itself, he wrote, is "that series of things which children and youth must do and experience by way of developing abilities to do the things well that make up the affairs of adult life" (1918, p. 17). One of the key features of this emphasis on skills-building is that skill acquisition can be measured by observing student behavior. Learning outcomes had to be measurable.

Social efficiency theory is arguably the framework that has had the largest effect on the enacted curriculum of today's classrooms. It is the root of the contemporary testing and school accountability movements, which have been extremely controversial in the United States. Social efficiency theory is central to understanding why SB 13 is so often treated as optional. When curriculum is organized around measurable outcomes, standardized assessments, and the efficient use of time, anything that does not fit within that framework, including relationship-building, storytelling, protocols, and the slow work of gathering hazel at the right time, is rendered invisible or dismissed as non-essential. The pressure to cover content, to meet standards, to demonstrate measurable outcomes is not a neutral feature of schooling. It is a force that makes the relational, process-oriented, and place-based dimensions of Indigenous knowledge appear inefficient and therefore expendable.

A third curricular turn provides a stark contrast to the perceived rigidity of subject-matter and efficiency orientations. The student-centered turn placed the learner's interests, experiences, and developmental needs at the heart of curriculum. Drawing on progressive and developmentalist traditions, this orientation understood curriculum as emerging from the child's lived experience rather than being imposed upon it. The curriculum was to be responsive, flexible, and personally meaningful. These curricular approaches started with a focus on the development of the individual child in the classroom rather than the imposition of knowledge or skills thought to be needed by society. Scholars advancing such ideas came from psychology, sociology, social work, philosophy, and social justice and are often grouped into the "progressive movement." These thinkers include Jane Addams, Anna Julia Cooper, John Dewey, William James, Maria Montessori, and others.

Dewey (1929) critiqued the social efficiency model as simply an engagement with rote memorization and recitation. He instead argued for an alternative in which curriculum was inextricably linked and intertwined with students' lived experiences. Addams (2009) offered a similar critique, arguing that social efficiency approaches simply reproduced the status quo. The unit of analysis in the learner-centered theory of curriculum is the individual student, meaning the teacher's goal is to guide and develop that student's innate and preexisting abilities by constructing environments that foster that development, with that student's "growth" as the objective. The frame's individual focus necessitates ontological and epistemological pluralism, precluding the possibility of privileging a single educational outcome that can be objectively measured.

Learner-centered theory offers both possibilities and limitations where Indigenous studies based approaches to education are concerned. On the one hand, its emphasis on student experience, curiosity, and growth resonates with relational pedagogies. On the other hand, learner-centered theory's focus on the individual student can obfuscate the collective, community-based, and more-than-human relations that are central to Indigenous epistemologies. Learner-centered theory can accommodate these practices, but it does not provide a vocabulary for understanding them as more than a form of aggregated individual growth. It does not account for the ways that learning is embedded in relationships that precede and exceed the individual student.

The fourth turn in curriculum theory focused on social transformation. It politicized curriculum by asking whose knowledge counts and whose interests schooling serves. Informed by critical theory and neo-Marxist analysis, this orientation viewed curriculum as a site of struggle over meaning, identity, and power. This view of curriculum assumed that "society is unhealthy" (Schiro, 2013, p. 151) and that most who function within that society cannot see that lack of health. The purpose of curriculum was not merely to reproduce society but to reconstruct it along more just and equitable lines. It questioned taken-for-granted assumptions about society and sought to expose the ideological functions of schooling.

This turn critiqued subject matter and social efficiency models, many social transformationists argued that these schools of thought ignored teacher practice altogether, leading them to miss a massive amount of what was actually being taught. The theory of the hidden curriculum, as it has been termed, has been framed in terms of class and social structure (Anyon, 1980). Those mainstream understandings have been further expanded in recent years to apply beyond economics to the contexts of gender (Basow, 2004; Booher-Jennings, 2008; Stinson, 2005), race (Langhout & Mitchell, 2008), disability studies (Stanley, J. K., et al, 2011), and other forms of oppression. Possibly the most famous work of social transformation theory is Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, in which the critical theorist argued that education can and should be a practice of freedom and social transformation (1996).

Social transformation theory is both indispensable and insufficient. It is indispensable because it names the fact that schools are not neutral sites of learning but are embedded in and reproductive of social hierarchies, including settler colonialism. Without this framework, it would be difficult to articulate why SB 13 matters, why the absence of Indigenous perspectives is not simply an oversight but an active erasure, and why the resistance to Indigenous-centered curriculum is not simply a matter of individual preference but an expression of systemic power.

Finally, there is the reconceptualist turn, which is most closely associated with William Pinar and Janet Miller. It fundamentally reoriented the field away from curriculum development and toward curriculum understanding. Rather than asking how to design curriculum to achieve certain ends, reconceptualists asked what curriculum does, how it shapes subjectivity, how it operates as lived experience, and how it functions as a complicated conversation about self, society, and history. Crucially, the reconceptualist turn expanded the concept of the hidden curriculum beyond the walls of the school. What Pinar and Miller demonstrated is that the hidden curriculum is not merely an institutional phenomenon but a societal one: the norms, values, silences, and power relations that structure schooling are continuous with those that structure the broader social order. The hidden curriculum, in this view, is society itself, its racial hierarchies, its gendered expectations, its economic logics refracted through the everyday routines of educational life. Reconceptualism thus made curriculum theory a critical, interpretive, and deeply political project, one concerned with the production of subjectivity and the reproduction of social worlds.

A Turn to More-Than-Human Agency

The present study begins within this broader reconceptualist horizon. It takes seriously the insight that curriculum is not a neutral delivery system but an agentic force that shapes how we come to know ourselves, others, and the world. It also accepts that the hidden curriculum extends far beyond the school, operating through the cultural, economic, and ecological arrangements of society at large.

However, the study goes a step further. The reconceptualist turn, for all its critical power, remained largely within a human-centered frame, attending to subjectivity, identity, and social power among human actors. In contrast, contemporary scholarship in Indigenous education and posthumanist theory invites us to consider non-human agency as a constitutive dimension of curriculum. Indigenous knowledge systems have long understood community as extending beyond humans, recognizing other-than-human agency and relational ontologies in which land, water, animals, and ancestors are active participants in learning and meaning-making. Posthumanist and new materialist frameworks converge with these insights, arguing that agency is not a uniquely human capacity but is distributed across human and non-human entities, materials, and environments. From this perspective, curriculum and pedagogy constitute a relational, open-ended, more-than-human entanglement of agencies, practices, discourses, matters, and encounters assembled in the process of teaching and learning.

By bringing these literatures into conversation with the reconceptualist tradition, the study does not abandon the critical insights of Pinar and Miller but extends them. It asks what it would mean to take seriously the possibility that the hidden curriculum is not only societal but also ecological, that the silences and lessons of schooling are shaped not only by human power relations but also by the agencies of the more-than-human world. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to a curriculum theory adequate to the entangled, multispecies, and more-than-human realities in which education is always already embedded.

Narrative As Methodology:

This research drew upon multiple theories that endorse the use of personal stories as data, as practice of analysis, and as a mode of representation in research. Primary among these is Tribal Critical Race Theory (Brayboy, 2005), which speaks directly to how personal narratives can be a part of a larger and longer cultural struggle against settler colonialism. Tribal Critical Race Theory respects personal experience as a source of insight that is more than just anecdote. Stories are how we have the ability to highlight things of lasting significance, draw attention to tensions that give structure to events, and build relations between the past, present, and future. In his widely cited essay "Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education," scholar Bryan Brayboy (2005) writes:

> *TribalCrit honors stories and oral knowledge as real and legitimate forms of data and ways of being. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory. ...stories serve as a way to orient oneself and others toward the world and life.* (p. 439)

Insofar as stories shared by participants and researchers are told from a particular perspective and include an evaluation of events, they constitute a form of theorizing about the experiences being recounted. This is done not just for the purposes of description but with an intent to advocate and intervene in what can be regarded as a relatively common colonialist dynamic.

The analysis involved in the recounting of stories is informed by and extends some of the tenets of Tribal Critical Race Theory. Most notably, it builds on the first tenet of Critical Race Theory, that "colonization is endemic to society*"* (Brayboy, p. 429). Stories document the way endemic colonization manifests in curricular decisions in a school. This anlaysis extends this tenet by highlighting how colonialism is not just present throughout schooling processes but is actively moving and changing. It is protean and moves with purpose in the work of educators. By presenting this new view of curricula, these stories-as-theory enact the fifth tenet of Tribal Critical Race Theory by showing how Indigenous theories of non-human agency (e.g., Deloria, 1999; Garroutte & Westcott, 2013; Marker, 2006, 2018) transform familiar understandings of curriculum, power, and knowledge to give them "new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens" (Brayboy, p. 429).

The narratives shared in this study take the form of what Leilani Sabzalian (2019) calls "survivance stories". In her book *Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools*, she explains how such stories reside at the intersection of settler colonialism, a structural form of oppression that transcends individual experience, and personal experiences of navigating those structures without being assimilated into them. She writes:

> *Survivance stories are characterized by their attention to colonialism but also to varied practices of survivance within that experience. Survivance draws attention*

to "Indigenous peoples' "active sense of presence" (Vizenor, 1999, p. vii) and creative negotiations amidst colonial dispossession." (p. 4).

The stories of settler colonialism's ability to shift when attempts to disrupt it are implemented draw attention to the shifting nature of the work attempting to teach against the grain of settler colonialism, particularly in the context of social studies teaching. The hegemonic stories about U.S. history that circulate through the school and community and put pressure on teachers' pedagogical decision-making are framed not as passive but dynamic, even agential (Garroute & Westcott, 2013; Pratt, 2021; Rosiek & Kinslow, 2016). This required an equally dynamic response, constant adaptation, and vigilant tracking to ensure that the curriculum did not get pulled into the "undertow" that pervasive settler colonialism creates.

Indigenous Studies/Place-Based Ways of Knowing:

Indigenous studies literature on place-based epistemologies focuses on how connections between land, its history, and local communities, including local flora and fauna, all influence the content and purpose of knowing. Within these theories, knowing is not an end goal but is instead a way of relating that shapes what is possible in a place. Knowing is an ontological act with consequences for the community. So, understanding the acts of knowing in this way helps us understand our relationship to place more deeply while not pinning down possibilities and making relationships to place static.

While the given understanding of "place-based theory" is an onto-epistemic grounding, the idea that place-based knowledge is sedimented, that there are truths located in place that are unwavering, Leanne Simpson (2017) challenges this notion when referring to theories of what she and other Indigenous scholars call "grounded normativity", stating;

> *Our thought systems within grounded normativity are fluid, dynamic, and responsive, and it is our responsibility to practice grounded normativity in the way it was intended: to build strong societies of individuals who are functioning as their bestselves.* (pg. 122)

I reference this work to note that while there is significance and importance in place-based knowledges for this research, it is accessed not to displace an idea of a universal truth with a place-based one. Instead the goal is to understand that settler colonialism is shifting and seemingly disparate, so to respond effectively to the unique challenges it presents on certain ways of being, our response must be unique and place-based, as settler colonialism will not always appear in the same way across all contexts. So, I am not stating that we need a response that is rigid and place-bound; that runs counter to the fluidity stated throughout this project as necessary to challenge systems which seek to reify settler futurities. Instead, the work is place-based by entering an understanding of a co-constitutive relationship with a place that is protean, fluid, retains its adaptability, and allows for responsiveness to the agentic nature of settler colonialism.

The more-than-human agency of place is frequently engaged within Indigenous studies literature. This includes references to co-constitutive relationships with place that go beyond anthropocentric occupation and use (Bang & Marin, 2015; Watts, 2013). Understanding the agentic nature of place enables us to understand the influence place has on knowledge at a fundamental level. For example, Michael Marker (2018) observes,

> *...the landscape is more than simply a container for human history. It is the mind of reality shaping the stories of time and space. The proportions of events and the meanings of the ecological relationships between humans, animals, plants, and*

> *geologic forms are undivided from the physical experience of, as many Elders put it, 'being on the land.*' (pg. 454)

This more agential understanding of place-based knowledges challenges systems of thought that perpetuate settler colonialism. Such systems of thought treat knowledge as an acquisition process, a means of capturing and controlling land to use for human purposes. But when the land is understood as acting back, as shaping us to its purposes, this one-sided relation is unsettled.

Unangan scholar Eve Tuck and environmental scholar Marcia McKenzie (2014) explain that "critical place inquiry…takes up critical questions and develops corresponding methodological approaches that are informed by the embeddedness of social life in and with places, and that seeks to be a form of action in responding to critical place issues such as those of globalization and neoliberalism, settler colonialism, and environmental degradation." (2). This study also draws on non-Indigenous theories about the relationship between curriculum and place, such as Rob Helfenbein's *Critical Geographies of Education: Space, Place, and Curriculum Inquiry* (2021) and David Greenwood's work on place conscious education (2013, 2019). These theories resonate with Siletz traditions of knowledge and ethics. As such, they enable a more careful analysis of how the meaning of the Tribal History/Shared History curricula emerge in relation to the people of Siletz and the land.

Non-Human/More-Than-Human Agency:

This study engages with both the Indigenous conception of non-human agency (more-than-human) and that of the Western canon. While it seems a bit foolhardy to attempt to bring these two forms of philosophical thought into conversation with one another, with the Western canon's potential and habituated practices of subsuming Indigenous thought and avoiding engaging with Indigenous thinkers, this may read as a lack of belief that the Indigenous studies

literature can stand on its own. With knowledge of both of these assumptions, I assert that this approach aims to avoid creating unnecessary divisions or foster contestation between the literature on Indigenous conceptions of non-human agency and Western philosophical traditions. Instead, I delve into these two bodies of literature in an attempt at a more robust engagement with the underlying agency of curricula. This is not about pitting the two against each other but about understanding the field better. As Brayboy and Maughan point out, "We want to emphasize that our objective here is not to set up a dichotomy between Western and Indigenous Knowledges, as this is not a particularly useful endeavor. Setting these knowledges in opposition to one another erases complexity and nuance, closing off spaces of potential and possibility" (pg. 5). I strive to avoid a binary view and instead explore their unique characteristics.

In an attempt at seeking this amelioration while avoiding allowing the Indigenous scholarship to be subsumed under the paradigm of Western posthumanism, I draw some similarities that come to the surface when these works are interrogated as well as some distinctions which set the two apart from one another. I do so as a way to respect the division while also moving towards a deeper understanding of more-than-human relations.

The comparisons between these two schools are undeniable. This could be attributed to what Vine Deloria and Daniel Wildcat refer to as episodes of convergence and emergence (2001); they refer to convergence as "The strong affinity or convergence between what I call the new complex view of science, and American Indian metaphysical traditions is worth exploring; both are at odds with the old mechanical and naive physical views of the world" (pg. 17) and emergence as "a model of change or development where change is not reducible to a discrete factor or factors, but rather the interaction of multiple factors or causes that are understood as processual in character as opposed to mechanical" (pg.16). These two concepts develop a

meaningful framework and build a tenable connection between Indigenous cosmologies and Western epistemologies. Therefore, these places of emergence and convergence deserve exploring.

I first draw attention to the Western academy's move away from tangibility and instead toward accepting that agency can take the form of non-corporeal beings, which perhaps deserves more analsys than those that we believe to be more material. These discursive practices or more-than-human relationships are irreducible and connect to these things that we view as more valuable due to their tangibility. C.S. Peirce articulates this when relating to ideas as intangible yet possessing a form of agency all their own, stating, "Thus, whether you accept the opinion or not, you must see that it is a perfectly intelligible opinion that ideas are not all mere creations of this or that mind, but on the contrary have a power of find or creating their vehicles, and having found them, of conferring upon them the ability to transform the face of the earth" (1992 pg. 123). This shares similarities with many Indigenous concepts of non-human agency.

Eva Garroute and Kathleen Westcott argue stories possess an agency, yet a non-corporeal nature in a similar capacity (2013). They exist and influence, and in a very real way, their existence has implications and must be respected as having agency that lacks tangibility and instead lives on the word:

> *Here's a way to think about [sacred] stories. Suppose you have a garden planted. It exists regardless of who knows about it. At every moment, things are changing all around the garden. The light and the weather are in flux. There may be different animals coming and going. But that garden will hold its shape and size, its directional orientation. It will also influence the conditions of the day, the region, the people. It's like*

that with a story. Even when no one is visiting the story, it is living .... It's a living part of its living context. (2013, pg. 68).

The acknowledgment of agency in the form of non-material entities is a place the Western academy is beginning to acknowledge and understand the implications of. The fear, of course, being that due to the lack of citational practice and an engagement with the Indigenous traditions, and tendency towards attempting to assimilate and domesticate Indigenous thought, they will continue to lag behind and treat notions of non-human agency as profound within our contemporary setting and not acknowledge that they have existed since time immemorial.

Another engagement where we see a place of emergence is found within Baradian theorists' notion of "spacetimemattering." Karen Barad (2017) argues for the irreducibility of the human, the mind, landscape, and time, stating "the spacetimemattering of the world in its sedimenting enfoldings of iterative intra-activity. Memory is not merely a subjective capacity of the human mind; rather, 'human' and 'mind' are part of the landtimescape - spacetimemattering - of the world. Memory is written into the worlding of the world in its specificity, the ineliminable trace of the sedimenting historicity of its iterative reconfiguring" (pg. 84). To not misrepresent Barad, it would be a misstep to say that they do not believe in time; that is past or future. Barad (2007) states, "As the rings of trees mark the sedimented history of their intra-actions within and as part of the world, so matter carries within itself the sedimented historialities[2] of the practices through which it is produced as part of its ongoing becoming" (pg. 180). Marker (2018) challenges us to step outside of time as a defined parameter for our engagement with non-human agents challenging Western scholars to do the same "what if scholars took the narratives of

[2] "Historialities" may be an acknowledgement of the work of Jacques Derrida and "may be a more appropriate term than "historicity, " since it connotes the important idea that time is an operator, not a parameter."

Elders and traditional Indigenous knowledge holders seriously about an intimate vastness of wisdom that percolates through the layers of physical and metaphysical time and space in sentient landscapes?" (pg.2). This episode of convergence is noteworthy, as Barad is coming to this conclusion from Western science (quantum physics) while Marker arrives at a similar place through an exploration/examination of Coastal Salish cosmology.

Perhaps one of the most important similarities that occur between the Western canon and Indigenous literature is the recurring theme of irreducibility. This has a significant impact on the work of the academy, which operates with the inherent understanding that knowledge that is valuable is able to be analyzed (taken apart), reduced (understood as a whole of its parts), and, lastly, have its mechanism (causal factors) understood. Irreducibility flies in the face of this analysis, reduction and mechanism as a stated goal; if the identity of things cannot be bracketed out and understood as a sum of parts, then the epistemic shift necessary for the academy to adjust may be cataclysmic as these systems, built upon the reproduction of settler colonial ideologies, must acknowledge the untenability of the goal of the academy.

Transitioning this understanding towards teacher education is an epistemic and ontological shift, which creates the necessary upheaval to contemporary practices that push academic spaces to be violent and lead to extensive teacher pushout. How does an understanding of agency speak across these schools of thought and apply to education? How do we create the shift to understand teacher pushout and Indigenous lack of acknowledgment or presence in the curriculum and not as a series of disparate factors? Instead, the agential forces of settler

colonialism, which, taken with this understanding, have coherency in effect, namely, in the furthering of settler futurities[3] and the silencing of Indigenous knowledge systems.

Following this brief overview of some of the comparisons offered when examining these two schools of thought, articulating the distinct edges of these concepts is also pivotal. This space would be disserved if the analysis ended with how they are similar without discussing the perceptible differences between them. Again, the goal is not to put these forms of thought at odds, but a non-acknowledgment of the differences serves neither school of thought.

One of the most notable distinctions between these schools of thought surrounding non-human agency, which Indigenous scholars have noted in regard to scholars such as Bruno Latour's (1987) Actor-Network Theory (ANT), is that Western thought tends to adopt the premise of interlocking, mutual exchange between the human and non-human world. It seeks to place this understanding of agency and separate it from concepts that are reserved for the human: purpose, motive, conviction, etc. Vicky Kirby (2008) steps into a place of allowing a capacity for influence outside of the human: "…it goes without saying that nature/the body/materiality preexists culture/intellect/abstraction, and furthermore, that the thinking self is not an articulation of matter's intentions" (p. 216). Kirby writes in a dualism hinted at by other scholars that the human capacity to think is distinct, while she allows space for commingling between earth and an agency outside of the human. She separates the human as the perceiving party and all of those

[3] Futurities refers to the ways and means by which "the future is rendered knowable through specific practices (i.e. calculation, imagination, and performance) and, in turn, intervenes upon the present through three anticipatory logics (i.e. pre-caution, pre-emption and preparedness)" (Baldwin, 2012, pg 173; see also Tuck and Gaztembide-Fernandez, 2013) this term has been utilized by Indigenous scholars to refer to way in which Indigenous truths and futurities run counter to those of settler futurities, and by its very existence settler futurity seeks the erasure and removal of Indigenous futurities. Indigenous futurities instead seek a generative space as well as "styles of thinking about the future, the types of practices that give content to a certain future, and the logics behind how present actions are legitimized or guided by specific futures" (Kulago, 2019, pg 243). Scholars like Laura Harjo state "[Indigenous futurities are] an action; it's a practice…that invokes our ancestors' and relatives' unactivated possibilities in our present lived moment, and it imagines future possibilities' ' (2019, pg. 34).

other things outside as perceivable. This reinscribes a hierarchy that is not present within Indigenous non-human agency. Indigenous scholars not only acknowledge non-human capacity to impact and act in self-replicating ways but also to influence human affairs, often recruiting us to their purposes. Vanessa Watts (2013) states, "Non-human beings are active members of society. Not only are they active, but they also directly influence how humans organize themselves into that society" (p. 23). This acknowledgment sets apart Indigenous scholarship from many Western thinkers whose view of agency is passive in that it is an acknowledgment of discursive agential "cuts" and assemblages (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). Not passive as in non-influential, but rather passive as without possession of will in the way Indigenous scholars allow.

The next place in which I note a divergence between these two interpretations of non-human agency is in the overall framing of that agency. Within Western scholarship, the idea of an agent outside of human consciousness acting upon human behavior is often framed as a negation of free will. The human is brought into a nonconsensual relationship with a more-than-human agent and, in doing so, is influenced in ways they must acknowledge to counter those effects. Barad (2007), in particular, challenges that these influences must be acknowledged in their development of the concept of intra-action, which are those practices that act through apparatuses that are "not mere observing instruments but boundary-drawing practices—specific material (re)configurations of the world—which come to matter[4]" (pg. 140). Earlier in this book, Barad (2007) states, "To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence" (pg. IX).

This framing of non-human agency as loss or lack is not present within Indigenous studies literature. Instead, these more-than-human relationships are often framed as liberatory.

[4] "matter" here is signifying both significance and materialization.

To become or be a part of something larger than oneself, to be in constant community with more-than-human agents, this engagement is profound and, within many communities, ineffable (Atleo, 2007). This connection is understood as additive and reciprocal. Scholars write this way in relationship to stories (Garroutte & Westcott, 2013), not as simple narrative, but possessing life and agency of their own, a notion of spirit, although this word is lacking in capturing the intensity and profound nature of this relationship (Deloria, 1999); and many scholars characterize the connection with land as additively agential. For example, Marker writes "In Indigenous cosmologies, the actual landscape does often have the capacity to name itself and uses the human beings to enact the self-naming. In this way of understanding reality, the human mind is a conduit for the consciousness of the land to be expressed in language" (2018, pg. 2). This relationship is framed in Indigenous studies as co-constitutive and mutually beneficial; the awareness of the association does not inherently lead to suspicion or a fear of a loss of individual autonomy, as is often the case in the Western canon.

Perhaps one of the most telling divisions between contemporary Western philosophical notions of non-human agency and those found within Indigenous scholarship is the lack of citational practice or acknowledgment of Indigenous philosophies by scholars identified with the Western canon. This limited engagement with the long-standing traditions and understandings of more-than-human relationships present in Indigenous knowledge systems represents a missed opportunity for Western traditions to understand more robustly the ethics and reciprocity inherent in these engagements. Where Western philosophies seem more interested in treating such agencies as foreign or lesser forms of agency, Indigenous cosmologies often frame these relationships through story, a notion of spirit that is deep and reciprocal, and a relationship with land that grounds profound place-based practices largely lacking in Western philosophy. This

irreconcilability is not a flaw, it is a line to be respected, "If scholars are to avoid the reproduction of settler colonial practices of extraction from Indigenous communities without reciprocal contribution to those communities, then this scholarly exchange will need to happen as part of a more robust solidarity in the political and material work of promoting the well-being of Indigenous peoples" (Rosiek et al., 2020, p. 343). The Western philosophical tradition, by contrast, seeks to understand these relationships in ways that minimize their effects and secure a sense of control over the universe rather than accept an ethical relationship with it.

Respect for the networked relations of land, meaning, human community, and ecologies involves treating them not just as objects for our analysis but also as dynamic influences that work through our thoughts and have lives of their own. Indigenous theories about non-human agency are widely varied and quite sophisticated. It is not just physical places that have agency but also discursive phenomena such as stories about the people and the land (Garroutte & Westcott, 2013). Since curriculum and curriculum development have been widely interpreted as a practice of storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2014; Goodson, 2014; Gudmundsdottir, 1991), this study examines the way particular curricular narratives take on a life of their own, recruiting people to their circulation and defense, and leveraging different forms of affect and social pressure.

This study is also informed by the work of physicist and feminist philosopher of science Karen Barad (2007), who, through a close examination of quantum physics experiments on the diffraction of light, has developed a theory of non-human agency that is implicit when objects of study are not static but are in part constituted by the way we come to know them. These theories do not presume objects of inquiry have consciousness, nor do they engage in a simplistic anthropomorphism (a racist assumption often projected onto Indigenous ontologies and

cosmologies by those unfamiliar with them.) Instead, they reject a stark divide between the ethics and epistemology of inquiries. These theories begin with the observation that research methodologies and ways of knowing influence how a phenomenon can emerge in our experience (a condition that is equally true in the physical and social sciences). It is this organic co-emergence of phenomena that suggests agency beyond that of humans is at work in our inquiries (see also Kirby, 2013; Rosiek, Snyder, & Pratt, 2020).

My goal in studying these parallel theories of more-than-human agency is to challenge our understanding of curriculum and the way we approach teacher education within a system of settler colonialism, which is built upon the unstated but omnipresent goal of moving towards settler futurities (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). An understanding of settler colonialism as agential and the efforts to silence Indigenous presence and thought not as a set of disparate moves but instead a complex assemblage of interwoven and agent ontologies should be discussed as such, and pre-service teachers should be offered the space to understand non-human agency and the complex forces represented therein as well as how colonialism operates within academic spaces which teachers inhabit.

Future educators also need to be prepared to navigate the social and institutional pushback that will likely emerge when settler futurities defend themselves. This requires building relationships with alternative Indigenous futurities that actively promote Indigenous epistemologies, metaphysics, and cultures, not as a practice that is additive, but rather transformative. The possibility of an agency that runs counter to that of settler colonialism makes possible a complex network that is not simply waiting to respond, but one that is always in place and operates with the alacrity and fluidity of settler colonialism itself.

This understanding of non-human agency and how it speaks across these schools of thought, these moments of emergence, counsels against compartmentalization of our analysis. Doing so should not, however, be reduced to providing teachers with strategies for dealing with the political blowback that can come from refusing settler futurities: as if the inclusion of specific curriculum content is one thing and the material and affective work of navigating school politics is another. Instead, I suggest an expansion of our understanding of curricula itself, beyond the classroom, discreet content knowledge, individual student experience, and even hidden curricula. Teachers would be better prepared for the work of refusing settler colonialism in schools if they understood curriculum as a complex mix of material, political, and affective relations of which particular knowledge claims and learning objectives are a small part.

State Level Efforts for Indigenized Curriculum

For a significant period, we have seen a concerted effort to implement Indigenous studies curricula in U.S. public schools. While this piece focuses overall on Oregon as an exemplar, other states have attempted, and in many ways succeeded, in implementing robust curricula by establishing legislative foundations, building coalitions, and confronting barriers. This section seeks to situate Oregon's experience within a broader landscape of state-led efforts to transform how public education addresses the histories, cultures, and contemporary realities of Indigenous peoples. It will begin with an examination of existing literature on Oregon's Senate Bill 13: Tribal History/Shared History, and then examine three additional state-level initiatives: Montana's Indian Education for All (IEFA), Hawai'i's Board of Education Policy 105-7, and Washington State's Since Time Immemorial (STI) curriculum, alongside smaller exemplars from other states. The goal is to establish the breadth of these efforts and to document the challenges that emerged across these distinct political, historical, and Indigenous contexts.

These initiatives share common foundational commitments; all four emerged from sustained advocacy and organizing that centered relationality between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous allies and prioritized Tribal sovereignty and self-determination. All four direct resources toward professional development, acknowledging that merely adding content does not transform curriculum. Transformation requires creating space for identities not represented in the status quo, and curricular materials alone are insufficient without building educators' ability to imagine an alternative to the normative settler-colonial curriculum. This work also emphasizes place-based content and attempts to create avenues of engagement with local Indigenous Nations.

While these efforts share similar goals and a commitment to connecting with Indigenous communities, they differ in significant ways.

Montana's Indian Education for All (IEFA) is constitutionally grounded. It was designed to be woven throughout the entire structure of Montana's education system. But that integration never fully happened. The gap between the constitutional promise and classroom reality led to a class-action lawsuit in 2021. That lawsuit was settled in 2026 after the courts recognized what tribal advocates had argued for years: the state had failed to allocate adequate resources and had not implemented an Indigenous-centered curriculum in a way that met its constitutional obligation.

Hawai'i's Policy 105-7 offers a different approach. It is integrated into the state's educational framework through initiatives like the Nā Hopena A'o framework and the Ka Papahana Kaiapuni immersion program. While Hawai'i's policy is not as comprehensive as some other states' efforts, it stands out for its insistence that culture and language cannot be separated.

It also attempts to create curricula that reflect Hawai'i's identity as a state with a large Indigenous population and a long history of language suppression.

Washington's Since Time Immemorial (STI) curriculum is statutorily mandated. It includes specific requirements for district-tribal collaboration and curriculum integration, and it is supported by an extensive professional development infrastructure. Oregon's SB 13, as examined in the previous chapter, combines mandatory curriculum with tribal partnerships and a phased rollout across grade levels.

The stakes of this work extend beyond academic outcomes. As Weiser-Nieto (2025) has documented, they encompass fundamental questions about whether Indigenous students will encounter themselves and their communities reflected with accuracy, dignity, and respect in their school curricula. They also ask whether non-Indigenous students will develop the historical understanding and relational awareness needed for just and equitable coexistence on Indigenous lands.

Oregon's Senate Bill 13: Tribal History/Shared History:

Oregon's Senate Bill 13 (SB 13), passed in 2017, marked a pivotal moment. It mattered not only for Indigenous families but also for non-Indigenous families who had limited experience with Indigenous knowledge systems and the Native peoples who live in what is now Oregon. SB 13 directed the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to partner with Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes to develop materials that centered Indigenous knowledge in K-12 classrooms across every curricular area. The legislation grew out of decades of Indigenous advocacy and organizing. It embodied a profound shift in how public education would address the histories, cultures, and contemporary realities of Oregon's Tribal Nations.

This action was met with general praise from Oregon's Indigenous communities. Scholars from major universities were tasked with its rollout. They wrote Tribal History/Shared History, developed essential understandings, and communicated with Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes. Those essential understandings include time immemorial, history, identity, language, genocide, federal policy and laws, treaties with the United States, lifeways, Tribal government, and sovereignty. The nine tribes are the Burns Paiute Tribe; the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians; the Coquille Indian Tribe; the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians; the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde; the Klamath Tribes; the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians; the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation; and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. Seeking tribal input regarding professional development, the nine tribes began building curriculum development teams, and the process was undertaken earnestly.

The passing of SB 13 reflected a growing recognition that the historical exclusion and frequent misrepresentation of Oregon's Indigenous peoples in education was not just an oversight. It was a continuation of colonial violence, carried out through curricular erasure and through misrepresentation of who Indigenous peoples are. Shadiin Garcia (2017) documented how curricula on Indigenous students' histories and perspectives in K-12 schools struggled to accurately represent Oregon's nine tribes. As she stated, "Not having accurate contemporary, historical, and place-based curriculum drafted in consultation with tribes is a huge disservice and a violation of the trust agreements the United States government entered into with its sovereign nations" (p. 8). This systemic failure demanded a systemic response.

Understanding this context for SB 13 requires situating it within a longer, more complex history of Indigenous resistance and a demand for representation in education. The push for SB

13 came from Indigenous communities in Oregon. They recognized that the stories told about Indigenous peoples in classrooms shape not only how Native students see themselves but also how non-Native students understand their relationships to their peers and to Indigenous communities, which are inseparable from Oregon's history. The passage of SB 13 was neither inevitable nor the product of sudden political will. Rather, it emerged from what Sabzalian, Morrill, and Edmo (2019) termed "deep organizing": sustained, relationship-based advocacy that centered Tribal sovereignty and Indigenous self-determination over decades.

In this sense, SB 13 represents an implicit acknowledgment by the state of Oregon that the original goal for schooling across the United States was assimilationist at best and ethnocidal at worst. In recent years, Oregon has sought to obscure the traumas U.S. "education" has represented to Indigenous communities: day schools, forced assimilation, and ethnocidal practices of cultural erasure through the boarding school era (Adams, 1995). Many believed that because Native children were no longer being forcibly removed from their families, systems of education were moving in a positive direction. But public schools remained and remain sites of harm, trauma, and erasure for Indigenous students and their families (Manning-Stevens, 2021; Sabzalian, 2019).

The goals of Tribal History/Shared History have to work against this history and acknowledge this trauma without centering it. To do so, they build curriculum and professional development units that attempt to center Indigenous brilliance and what Eve Tuck (2009) calls "desire-centered" curricula. This shift is implicit, but it is present and prevalent throughout the curriculum produced by the tribal communities. Tribes developed lessons for math that centered Indigenous creativity, science that centered Indigenous ingenuity, and social studies that centered Indigenous resilience. The professional development focuses on working with educators to

prevent them from falling into patterns of damage-centered narratives and to encourage thoughtful execution of these units.

Despite these efforts, the rollout of Tribal History/Shared History was met with almost immediate pushback. School districts refused to send educators to professional development trainings because they lacked funds to support time out of the classroom. Teachers expressed discomfort in leading coursework for tribal communities under conditions where they feared scrutiny. Most unexpectedly, scholars and curriculum developers encountered apathy. Administration in many districts across Oregon was indifferent to Senate Bill 13, and this indifference manifested as non-acknowledgment of the mandate. When it was acknowledged, it was done in passing (Hatch & Rosiek, 2024), which changed little for Indigenous students.

This was partly because the mandate lacked enforcement protocols. Nothing compelled schools to send and support educators seeking these professional development opportunities. Outreach to non-tribal communities was limited, so few educators knew about the mandate. There was no backlash for not adhering to the requirements laid out by Tribal History/Shared History. With the lack of resources and enforcement procedures, schools fell into comfortable and habituated silences on the topic of Indigeneity outside of the predetermined acknowledgments found primarily in the month of November (Native American Heritage Month) and through units regarding the Trail of Tears.

The implementation of SB 13 has unfolded across multiple levels of Oregon's educational system, from state agencies to individual classrooms, engaging a diverse array of professionals and community members, including Tribal education directors, district administrators, school principals, classroom teachers, students, families, and community advocates. This section draws upon a growing body of scholarship examining various dimensions of this implementation,

including Luong's (2023) embedded case study of the coalition-building processes essential to translating policy into practice, and Rochelle Weiser-Nieto's (2025) research on the healing dimensions of curriculum that celebrates our culture.

Several themes run through this scholarship and shape how I approach the analysis in this section. First, implementation is not simply a matter of handing out curriculum materials and training teachers. It is a relational process. It requires ongoing engagement with Tribal communities and the cultivation of partnerships that are meaningful, reciprocal, and built to last. Luong (2023) put it plainly: "building coalitions with Tribal Nations should be meaningful, reciprocal, and sustained." The success of SB 13 depends fundamentally on the quality of relationships between educational institutions and the communities they serve.

The second theme is that barriers to full implementation persist. These include political resistance rooted in settler colonial ideologies, resource constraints, competing educational priorities, and the need for robust, ongoing professional development. Garcia (2017) concluded that implementation challenges are fundamentally "rooted in a colonized paradigm." This suggests that meaningful implementation requires more than adding Indigenous content to existing structures. It requires transforming those structures themselves. Implementation, in other words, occurs within contested terrain.

The third theme is more hopeful. Despite these challenges, the evidence regarding SB 13's impact is encouraging. Luong (2023) documented that educators observed TH/SH's curriculum implementation as having a "profound" and "powerful" impact on AI/AN students. Non-AI/AN students, meanwhile, were observed to be more "receptive" and "empathetic" as a result of the curriculum. Weiser-Nieto's (2025) research illuminates how curriculum that accurately represents Indigenous histories and cultures supports historical healing. It counters the

narratives of erasure and cultural inferiority that have historically characterized educational experiences for Indigenous students. These findings affirm the gift-giving logic articulated by Jacob et al. (2018): Indigenous Knowledges benefit all students and contribute to more just and equitable educational environments.

The fourth theme is that implementation is an ongoing process, not a discrete event. As Danzuka noted, "implementation is ongoing throughout the school year and not one and done." The ODE's phased approach to rolling out curriculum across grade levels reflects this understanding. Initial implementation at grades 4, 8, and 10 was followed by expansion to additional grades. This phased approach acknowledges that systemic change requires sustained commitment over time. It also acknowledges the practical realities of curriculum development, professional development, and the need to build both educator capacity and community trust.

This section proceeds in five main points. It begins with the historical context and legislative foundations of SB 13, tracing the decades of Indigenous advocacy that culminated in the law's passage. It then explores the coalition-building processes essential to both enactment and implementation, drawing particularly on Luong's (2023) embedded case study and Sabzalian, Morrill, and Edmo's (2019) analysis of deep organizing. The third section addresses the framework and requirements of implementation, including curriculum content areas, Essential Understandings, and professional development structures. The fourth section examines barriers and challenges, including political resistance, resource constraints, and the persistence of settler colonial paradigms. The fifth section analyzes the impact of SB 13 on students, educators, and communities, drawing on empirical research documenting both academic and affective outcomes. The chapter concludes with implications for policy and practice.

In examining the implementation of SB 13, this section contributes to broader scholarly conversations about Indigenous education, curriculum policy implementation, and the possibilities and limitations of legislative mandates in advancing educational justice. The Oregon experience offers both inspiration and caution. It demonstrates that meaningful curriculum reform is possible. It also reveals the persistent challenges that accompany efforts to transform educational institutions shaped by settler colonialism. As Weiser-Nieto's (2025) research title suggests, "It Celebrates Our Culture!" The stakes of this work extend beyond academic outcomes. They include the fundamental question of whether Indigenous students will see themselves and their communities reflected accurately, with dignity and respect, in their schools' curricula. Implementing SB 13 represents Oregon's ongoing attempt to answer that question affirmatively.

Montana's Indian Education for All (IEFA):

Montana shares Oregon's commitment to transforming K-12 education by integrating Indigenous history, culture, and contemporary issues. Known as Indian Education for All (IEFA), recognizing the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and committing the state, through its educational goals, to the preservation of their cultural integrity (Szpaller, 2026). This distinction matters because it establishes Indigenous education not simply as a policy preference subject to political winds but as a fundamental educational obligation of the state.

The foundation for this work was laid in 1972, when Montana's Constitution was adopted with Article X, Section 1(2). The provision states: "The state recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of the American Indians and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity" (Montana Constitution, 1972; Montana PBS, 2018). This

constitutional commitment emerged from advocacy by delegates at the 1972 Constitutional Convention who recognized the need for the state to affirm the cultural integrity of its Indigenous peoples (Montana Office of Public Instruction n.d.; Native News Online, 2022). Their vision was significant, but it would take decades to develop a statutory and educational framework for its implementation. OPI identifies the 1972 constitutional provision as the foundation of IEFA and notes that the Legislature passed House Bill 528 in 1999, twenty-seven years later, to establish the statutory framework now known as Indian Education for All.

For more than twenty-five years, this constitutional commitment lacked a comprehensive statutory framework for implementation. In 1999, with the passage of House Bill 528, the Montana Legislature enacted the Indian Education for All Act (MCA 20-1-501) to reaffirm and implement the constitutional mandate (Montana PBS, 2018). The statute's legislative intent was explicit. It declared that "every Montanan, whether Indian or non-Indian, be encouraged to learn about the distinct and unique heritage of American Indians in a culturally responsive manner." It further required that "every educational agency and all educational personnel will work cooperatively with Montana tribes... to include information specific to the cultural heritage and contemporary contributions of American Indians, with particular emphasis on Montana Indian tribal groups and governments" (MCA 20-1-501, 1999). The law also emphasized that all school personnel should gain an understanding of and appreciation for American Indian people to help them relate effectively with Indian students and parents (MCA 20-1-501, 1999). This legislative action gave the constitutional commitment a specific statutory framework and established responsibilities for educational agencies and personnel. Indigenous perspectives within the curriculum could no longer be treated as peripheral to Montana's K-12 educational obligations (Stanton et al., 2019).

IEFA applies to all Montana students, Native and non-Native, and requires the integration of American Indian cultural heritage into the curriculum, with particular emphasis on Montana Indian tribal groups and governments. Montana is home to twelve federally recognized tribes comprising eight tribal nations: the Blackfeet Tribe; Chippewa-Cree Tribes; Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes; Crow Tribe; Fort Belknap Tribes; Fort Peck Tribes; Little Shell Chippewa Tribe; and Northern Cheyenne Tribe (Montana Office of Public Instruction, n.d.). OPI's current materials emphasize that IEFA is intended to address the diversity of these tribal nations and to incorporate their cultural heritage, contemporary contributions, governments, and sovereignty into Montana education. This comprehensive approach reflects what Carjuzaa et al. (2010) described as the practical application of multicultural education theory, exploring how educators are best prepared to implement a transformative educational policy that recognizes the cultural heritages of American Indians.

A critical component of IEFA's strength lies in its foundation in constitutional and statutory law. This legal grounding has reframed the work from what was traditionally treated as a recommendation to a more clearly defined educational requirement of the state. Montana's subsequent statutory and regulatory framework has incorporated IEFA into curriculum, content standards, accreditation, and school reporting requirements. Stanton and Morrison (2018) investigated curricular policy as a tool to dismantle what they termed "the master's house," examining how IEFA and social studies teacher education can work together to challenge Eurocentric curricular frameworks. The constitutional foundation has provided IEFA with a degree of institutional durability that distinguishes it from initiatives dependent solely on changing political priorities or temporary funding. Prior to this form of curricular mandate, Indigenous curriculum projects could fade when political priorities shifted or funding dried up.

IEFA's legal foundation has contributed to its recognition as an influential model for Indigenous curricular reform.

IEFA's influence on other states' work in Indigenous curricular mandates is significant. Montana is often viewed as a leader in expanding the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives within education (Stanton et al., 2019), and the program has become an influential model for Indigenous curricular reform. As Hopkins (2020) examines in his book on decolonizing Indigenous education in public schools, IEFA demonstrates how mandates can create the institutional momentum necessary to challenge a Eurocentric curriculum in favor of contemporary representations of Indigenous peoples. Hopkins argues that teachers and schools need to privilege Indigenous knowledge and explicitly integrate decolonization concepts into learning and teaching to address the academic gaps in Native education. IEFA provides a model for how this can be pursued through policy, curriculum development, and professional development.

Furthermore, IEFA demonstrates the strength of tribal collaboration through the involvement of Montana's tribal nations in curriculum development. The Office of Public Instruction (OPI) works in partnership with tribal communities to create comprehensive resources, including lesson plans and professional development opportunities for educators (Montana Office of Public Instruction, n.d.). OPI states that its IEFA curriculum resources are developed with the advice and assistance of cultural consultants from Montana Tribal Nations and that members of the Montana Advisory Council on Indian Education have provided input and review of tribal-specific materials (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2026). The OPI has developed more than 100 model lesson plans across various content areas and grade levels, including 110 lesson plans specifically for social studies (IEFA Compass, 2025). The agency has also established a feedback portal to gather input from educators, families, tribal members, and

community partners. The agency uses this feedback to improve IEFA resources and implementation in collaboration with tribal nations (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2025).

This ongoing tribal input and collaboration are intended to promote cultural accuracy and relevance. It reflects what Ngai and Koehn (2010) identified in their study of IEFA implementation in a K-5 public school: the importance of teacher and family partnerships for student learning and the implications for classroom teaching, education policy, and Native communities. Ngai and Koehn (2011) further explored how IEFA supports Indigenous education for critical democracy, examining teacher approaches and learning outcomes in K-5 programs.

Carjuzaa et al. (2015) documented how IEFA has thrived even in a national climate of anti-ethnic studies, demonstrating the resilience of a program grounded in constitutional mandate and tribal partnership. Carjuzaa and Hunts (2013) explored how educators can think outside disciplinary boundaries to integrate IEFA across the curriculum, showing the program's adaptability and potential for comprehensive integration. These studies collectively illustrate that IEFA is not merely a set of lesson plans but a systemic approach to transforming how Montana's schools teach about and with Indigenous peoples.

However, similarly to Oregon's Tribal History/Shared History, IEFA has struggled with implementation due to weaknesses in the structures available to enforce and monitor the mandates passed down from the state. This means that, although transformative, those looking for opportunities to avoid meaningful engagement in this curricular shift have at times been able to do so. The consequences of this implementation and accountability gap became the subject of a class-action lawsuit. Montana's later statutory changes and the 2026 settlement further demonstrate that the state has increasingly sought to connect IEFA implementation to reporting, accreditation, and accountability mechanisms.

In 2021, a group of Montana students, families, and tribes filed a class-action lawsuit against the Office of Public Instruction and the Montana Board of Public Education, alleging that the state had failed to adequately implement and enforce IEFA and that school districts had improperly used funds intended to support the program (Associated Press, 2026). The plaintiffs included eighteen students and their guardians from public schools in communities including Missoula, Billings, Helena, and Great Falls, as well as six Montana tribal nations: the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Reservation, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Fort Belknap Indian Community, the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana, the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, and the Crow Tribe of Montana (Szpaller, 2026). The case, DuPuis-Pablo v. Montana Office of Public Instruction, alleged that the state had failed to adequately implement and enforce the constitutional mandate requiring Montana's educational system to recognize the "distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians" (Associated Press, 2026).

Court documents alleged that for fiscal years 2019 and 2020, only 10% of Montana school districts reported IEFA expenditures on their Annual Trustees Financial Summaries (Associated Press, 2026). The litigation also identified examples of expenditures that plaintiffs argued were inconsistent with the purposes of IEFA. One school used a portion of its IEFA funds to pay librarian salaries, while other schools allegedly used funds to purchase books unrelated to Native American culture or history (Associated Press, 2026). Nearly 150 schools had submitted zero or incomplete proof of IEFA expenditures in a single academic year (Missoulian, 2025). Despite ongoing state funding of approximately $3.5 million annually for IEFA, the lack of consistent oversight and meaningful accountability resulted in uneven implementation across

school districts. In practice, plaintiffs argued that IEFA was too often treated as optional rather than as a requirement (ACLU, 2026).

The parties reached a landmark settlement agreement in 2026, and the court granted preliminary approval to the agreement, subject to final court approval following a notice period (ACLU, 2026). The settlement creates long-awaited accountability measures intended to ensure that Montana schools implement the state's constitutional and statutory IEFA requirements. The agreement outlines programmatic changes, including strengthened tribal consultation and enforcement measures. Under the agreement, OPI will use its accreditation system to require districts to provide evidence of IEFA implementation. It will establish enforcement mechanisms, including an annual evaluation of IEFA expenditures at at least seven schools and potential funding reductions for noncompliance. It will strengthen and formalize tribal consultation processes. It will also require schools to report IEFA expenditures and provide for publication of a list of noncompliant schools (Associated Press, 2026; Szpaller, 2026).

The settlement represents a significant development for tribal nations and families who had long argued that the constitutional promise of IEFA was not being fully realized. Michael Dolson, chair of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, described the settlement as "long overdue," stating: "This settlement means accountability for implementing that commitment, with real reporting, real curriculum developed with Tribes, and real consequences when schools fail to deliver" (Associated Press, 2026). Councilwoman Roxanne Gourneau of the Fort Peck Tribal Executive Board noted: "For too long, tribes were expected to trust that things would improve without having a seat at the table. This settlement recognizes that tribal nations are essential partners in educating Montana's students" (Szpaller, 2026). Cammie DuPuis-Pablo, the lead plaintiff and a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, said: "I'm hoping

now as my younger kids go through the educational system, they're able to see themselves better represented. It hopefully takes away some of the stigma or ignorance or misunderstanding of Native peoples" (Szpaller, 2026). These statements reflect the plaintiffs' emphasis on accountability, meaningful tribal participation, and improved representation in Montana classrooms.

Montana's experience with IEFA offers both inspiration and caution for other states pursuing Indigenous curricular mandates, including Oregon. On one hand, IEFA demonstrates that a constitutional mandate can provide a durable foundation for Indigenous education. It establishes the teaching and integration of Native history, culture, and contemporary contributions as a fundamental educational obligation of the state rather than a purely discretionary choice. The program's collaboration with tribal nations and its development of comprehensive resources through the Office of Public Instruction serve as a model for how state-tribal partnerships can produce high-quality, culturally informed curriculum.

On the other hand, IEFA's long struggle with implementation reveals that even a strong legal foundation is insufficient without enforcement mechanisms, adequate resources, and meaningful accountability. The five-year class-action lawsuit and its settlement underscore that constitutional commitments must be backed by concrete structures to ensure that they translate into classroom practice. Montana's recent statutory changes and settlement are particularly significant because they connect IEFA to accreditation, expenditure reporting, tribal consultation, and potential consequences for noncompliance. As Hopkins (2020) argues, meaningful reform requires not merely adding Indigenous content to existing structures but transforming those structures themselves. IEFA's constitutional and statutory foundation

provides the mandate. The work of transforming Montana's educational system to fully realize that mandate continues.

Arizona's Indigenous Curricular Implementation:

Arizona shares Oregon and Montana's commitment to transforming K-12 education by integrating Indigenous history, culture, and contemporary issues. However, Arizona's approach to Indigenous curriculum mandates differs in significant ways. While Montana's Indian Education for All (IEFA) program is grounded in a constitutional provision and Oregon's SB 13 emerged from legislative action in 2017, Arizona's efforts have unfolded primarily through two statutes enacted in 2004 that require instruction concerning Native American history in Arizona's public schools (Benally, 2019). These mandates, while significant in their intent, have confronted a policy environment marked by tensions between Indigenous sovereignty and state control, revealing both opportunities for and limitations on meaningful curricular transformation.

Arizona's work began in 2004, when the Arizona Legislature enacted two statutes addressing Native American history instruction. Arizona Revised Statute (A.R.S.) § 15-341 directs public school governing boards to "incorporate instruction on Native American history into appropriate existing curricula," while A.R.S. § 15-710 requires schools to provide instruction in Arizona history, "including the history of Native Americans in Arizona" (Benally, 2019). These statutes were passed in the midst of what Benally (2019) characterized as an "English-only, high-stakes testing, Eurocentric policy matrix in Arizona," a context that significantly shaped how the mandates would be interpreted and implemented. Unlike Montana's constitutional grounding or Oregon's more explicit partnership-based approach, Arizona's 2004 mandates emerged within a political climate that simultaneously restricted bilingual education

and ethnic studies, creating what Benally (2018) described through the distinction between "safe" and "dangerous" policy processes.

Benally's (2019) research examines the 2004 legislation through the lens of what she terms "zones of sovereignty" in Native American history instruction policies. She argues that while the mandates created formal opportunities for Indigenous knowledge to enter public school curricula, they did not establish the conditions for meaningful tribal sovereignty over curricular content or implementation. The statutes required instruction about Native Americans but did not expressly require consultation with or curricular control by Native nations over what that instruction would entail. This distinction matters because, as Benally (2019) demonstrates, policies that mandate content without establishing meaningful mechanisms for Indigenous participation and authority can reproduce colonial relationships rather than transform them. The title of her article captures this tension directly: "You Need to Go Beyond Creating a Policy."

The implementation of these mandates has been uneven across Arizona's school districts, reflecting broader patterns of inconsistency that also characterize Montana's IEFA and Oregon's SB 13. Benally (2014) documented how Native parents and community members have worked to create and negotiate "Native spaces" within public school systems. Her research in urban Arizona schools reveals that, despite the existence of the 2004 mandates, implementation depended substantially on the actions and advocacy of individual educators, parents, and community members rather than solely on systemic enforcement. This finding echoes implementation challenges observed in Montana and Oregon, where the existence of a mandate does not necessarily guarantee consistent or meaningful classroom implementation.

Benally's (2018) analysis of "safe" versus "dangerous" policy processes offers a particularly useful framework for understanding Arizona's implementation dynamics. She distinguishes between policy processes that preserve dominant interests and those that challenge existing power arrangements and settler colonial structures of schooling. The 2004 mandates, Benally argues, created opportunities for Native American history to enter public school curricula but did not necessarily disrupt the structures through which that history was taught. They required the inclusion of Native American history but did not expressly require teaching it through Indigenous epistemologies, centering tribal sovereignty, or developing it in consultation with tribal nations. When educators or community members attempted to make the curriculum more transformative by centering Indigenous perspectives on land, sovereignty, and ongoing colonization, they could encounter resistance from administrators, parents, and political actors.

This dynamic is illustrated by the broader political context in which Arizona's mandates operated. In 2010, Arizona enacted HB 2281, which restricted certain forms of ethnic studies in public schools and was widely understood as targeting the Mexican American Studies program in Tucson Unified School District. Subsequent federal litigation found that discriminatory intent played a role in the enactment and enforcement of the law. This political climate created significant tensions for educators seeking to implement culturally responsive curricula. The simultaneous existence of requirements for Native American history instruction and restrictions on certain forms of ethnic studies created a contradictory policy environment in which educators had to navigate between competing directives. As Benally (2019) demonstrates, Arizona's approach to Native American history instruction must be understood within the state's broader policy environment concerning diversity, difference, and public education.

Despite these challenges, Benally's research also documents instances of meaningful implementation. In her 2014 study, she identified educators and community members who found ways to create Native spaces within public schools despite the constraints of the policy environment. These efforts often involved individual educators, Native parents, and community members working to bring Indigenous perspectives into classrooms outside or alongside formal policy structures. Benally describes these efforts as forms of "negotiation" through which Native peoples asserted their presence and knowledge within institutions that were not designed to accommodate them. These findings resonate with Luong's (2023) documentation of coalition-building in Oregon, where meaningful implementation depended on relationships and commitments that exceeded formal policy requirements.

Arizona's policy history also demonstrates that the limitations of the 2004 mandates have been recognized within subsequent efforts to strengthen Native American education. In 2023, Arizona lawmakers introduced HB 2513, a proposal that would have established a substantially more comprehensive framework for Native American instruction beginning in the 2025-26 school year. The proposed legislation addressed tribal history, sovereignty, treaty rights, tribal government, culture, socioeconomic experiences, current events, and the contemporary experiences of Native peoples. It also proposed professional development for educators and provided federally recognized tribes with opportunities to collaborate in developing Native American instruction and related professional development (Arizona Legislature, 2023). The bill therefore represented an important potential shift from the relatively limited content requirements established in 2004 toward a model that more explicitly recognized tribal participation and the broader political, cultural, and contemporary dimensions of Indigenous education. However, HB 2513 did not become law. Its failure illustrates the continuing political

difficulty of translating proposals for more comprehensive Indigenous curricular reform into statewide policy.

Arizona's experience has significant implications for other states pursuing Indigenous curricular mandates, including Oregon and Montana. On one hand, Arizona demonstrates that legislative mandates alone are insufficient to produce meaningful curricular transformation. The 2004 statutes established a legal requirement to include Native American history, yet they did not establish comprehensive requirements for tribal consultation, enforcement, professional development, or dedicated implementation structures. As Benally (2019) argues, "you need to go beyond creating a policy" to ensure that Indigenous knowledge enters classrooms in ways that honor tribal sovereignty and serve Indigenous students. The later introduction of HB 2513 demonstrates that Arizona lawmakers have considered moving toward such a more comprehensive framework, even though that proposal did not become law.

On the other hand, Arizona's experience also shows that even in challenging political environments, opportunities to create "zones of sovereignty" exist. These zones are not limited to formal policy structures but can emerge through the agency of Native educators, students, families, and community members who assert Indigenous presence and knowledge within public schools. Benally's (2018) framework of "safe" versus "dangerous" policy processes offers a tool for analyzing how and when Indigenous curricular efforts can move beyond safe inclusion toward more transformative engagements with settler colonial structures of schooling.

For Oregon's SB 13, which includes explicit requirements for tribal partnership and place-based curriculum developed in consultation with tribes, Arizona's experience underscores the importance of those provisions. Oregon's enacted mandate goes further than Arizona's 2004

statutes in explicitly incorporating tribal involvement into curriculum development. Arizona's later HB 2513 proposal suggests that there has also been recognition within Arizona of the need for greater tribal collaboration and a more comprehensive approach to Native American education. However, because HB 2513 did not become law, Arizona's enacted framework remains less explicit than Oregon's regarding formal tribal participation in curriculum development. The implementation challenges documented in both states nevertheless reveal common patterns of resistance, resource constraints, and gaps between legislative intent and classroom practice. The Arizona case suggests that even when policies are designed to challenge established curricular norms, administrative indifference, political opposition, and a lack of meaningful accountability can limit implementation.

As with Montana's IEFA and Oregon's SB 13, the work of implementing Indigenous curriculum in Arizona continues. The 2004 mandates established an important legal foundation, however incomplete. Subsequent scholarship has documented both the limitations of those mandates and the opportunities they created for Native educators, families, and communities to assert Indigenous knowledge and presence within public schools. The unsuccessful 2023 effort to expand Arizona's Native American education requirements further demonstrates that the state's policy trajectory remains contested. Tribal nations, Native educators, and community advocates continue to press for meaningful implementation that centers Indigenous knowledge, contemporary Indigenous experiences, and tribal sovereignty. Their efforts reflect a broader movement across the United States to transform public education in ways that honor Indigenous histories, cultures, governments, and contemporary realities. Arizona's experience with its 2004 mandates offers both caution and inspiration for this ongoing work, showing that policy is

necessary but insufficient for the kind of transformation Indigenous communities have long demanded and deserve.

Hawai'i's Indigenous Curricular Implementation (Policy 105-7):

Hawai‘i shares Oregon, Montana, and Arizona's commitment to transforming K-12 education by integrating Indigenous history, culture, language, and contemporary issues. However, Hawai‘i's approach differs in ways that matter. The other states examined in this chapter operate primarily within a framework of tribal-federal relations. Hawai‘i's context is shaped by the unique political and legal status of Native Hawaiians, who are Indigenous to Hawai‘i but are not federally recognized as an Indian tribe. Hawai‘i's educational context is also shaped by the historical relationship between Native Hawaiians and the Hawaiian Kingdom and by the state's constitutional recognition of Hawaiian culture, history, and language. Hawai‘i is also the only state in the country that has designated Hawaiian as one of its two official state languages. This distinction matters because it establishes Hawaiian education not simply as a curricular addition but as a constitutional and cultural imperative rooted in language revitalization and the preservation of Hawaiian cultural identity.

The foundation for this work was laid in 1978, when the State Constitutional Convention amended Article X, Section 4 of the Hawai‘i Constitution to require the state to promote the study of Hawaiian culture, history, and language. The provision states that the state "shall promote the study of Hawaiian culture, history and language" and that the use of community expertise should be encouraged in implementing this commitment. This constitutional provision emerged from the broader Hawaiian Renaissance and community advocacy that sought to restore Hawaiian culture and language after decades of suppression. Hawaiian was excluded from

public-school instruction for about ninety years after an 1896 law prohibited Hawaiian as a medium of instruction in public schools and established English as the required medium. This policy contributed to the severe decline of the Hawaiian language and disrupted its intergenerational transmission. By 1978, estimates placed the number of fluent ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi speakers at approximately 2,000, compared with nearly 40,000 in 1896 (Hawaiʻi State Legislature, 2025). The constitutional amendment emerged from this broader period of Hawaiian Renaissance and community advocacy and provided a constitutional foundation for subsequent efforts to revitalize Hawaiian language and culture through public education.

Hawaiʻi's constitutional recognition of Hawaiian language also extends beyond education. Article XV, Section 4 of the Hawaiʻi Constitution establishes English and Hawaiian as the State's official languages. Together, these constitutional provisions provide an unusually strong legal foundation for Hawaiian education: Article X, Section 4 establishes a state obligation to promote the study of Hawaiian culture, history, and language, while Article XV, Section 4 recognizes Hawaiian as an official language of the state. This constitutional framework distinguishes Hawaiʻi from the other states examined in this chapter and provides a legal foundation for language revitalization within the public education system.

In 1980, the Department of Education established the Hawaiian Studies Program to implement the 1978 constitutional mandate. The program was designed to provide curriculum support and resources for the instruction and learning of Hawaiian culture, history, and language. The Department began its efforts in 1979 with a Kūpuna Program pilot developed by the Queen Liliʻuokalani Trust. The pilot was adopted as a component of the Hawaiian Studies Program in 1981 and gradually implemented statewide to serve students in grades K-6. Knowledge, skills,

and practices integral to Hawaiian education include Ka mālama ʻāina (knowledge and stewardship of the land, ocean, and sky), Ka moʻolelo Hawaiʻi (knowledge and use of the language, legends, stories, and arts), Ka nohona (knowledge and practice of Hawaiian culture and way of life), and Ka ʻike kūpuna (knowledge and consideration of history, origins, genealogy, and governance of Hawaiʻi).

The Board of Education's Policy 105-7 provides the policy framework for these efforts. The policy states that "Hawaiʻi's public education system should embody Hawaiian values, language, culture and history as a foundation to prepare students in grades K-12 for success in college, career and communities, locally and globally. Hawaiian language, culture, and history should be an integral part of Hawaiʻi's education standards for all students in grades K-12" (Hawaiʻi State Board of Education). The policy also recognizes that appropriate support for and implementation of Hawaiian education can positively affect educational outcomes for all students. This universal framing reflects what Jacob et al. (2018) described as the "gift of education," the idea that Indigenous knowledges are resources that can transform public education for everyone. Rather than positioning Hawaiian knowledge as relevant only to Native Hawaiian students, the policy establishes Hawaiian language, culture, and history as integral components of education for all students in the state.

A critical component of Hawaiʻi's approach is Ka Papahana Kaiapuni, or the Hawaiian Language Immersion Program. In the mid-1980s, Hawaiian language immersion education emerged as a central component of the language revitalization movement. In 1987, the Board of Education approved the development of Hawaiian language immersion schools, marking a historic milestone in revitalizing ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi (Hawaiʻi State Legislature, 2025). The program

provides Hawaiian-medium instruction, with English formally introduced as a subject beginning in grade 5. In 2004, Hawaiian language immersion education was codified in the Hawai‘i Revised Statutes under Chapter 302H, establishing the statutory framework for Ka Papahana Kaiapuni. Policy 105-8, which governs the Kaiapuni Educational Program, provides that "every student within the State of Hawai‘i's public school system should have reasonable access to the Kaiapuni Educational Program" (Hawai‘i State Board of Education). During the 2024-25 school year, Kaiapuni programs served 3,772 students, including 2,452 students in 22 Department of Education Kula Kaiapuni programs and 1,320 students in six Hawaiian-language immersion charter schools (Hawai‘i State Department of Education, 2025).

The Nā Hopena A‘o (HĀ) framework represents another significant dimension of Hawai‘i's approach to culturally responsive education. Established in 2015 through Board of Education Policy E-3, HĀ is a Department-wide framework designed to develop the skills, behaviors, and dispositions that reflect Hawai‘i's unique context and to honor the qualities and values of the Indigenous language and culture of Hawai‘i. The framework focuses on six outcomes: belonging, responsibility, excellence, aloha, total well-being, and Hawai‘i (BREATH). The Department of Education describes HĀ as a framework that involves the broader community in developing competencies that strengthen these outcomes in students and others. HĀ reflects the uniqueness of Hawai‘i and is intended to be meaningful in all places of learning, supporting a holistic learning process with universal application across the school community. Although HĀ is not itself a Hawaiian-language curriculum mandate, it provides a broader framework through which Hawaiian values and cultural knowledge can inform educational practice across the public school system.

Research on culturally responsive practices in Hawaiian classrooms has documented both the promise and the challenges of implementation. Taira and Maunakea (2023) used qualitative storytelling methodology to explore the culturally responsive practices of five educators in Hawai‘i. Their study, titled "Ma ka hana ka ‘ike" (knowledge comes from doing), documented how educators implemented culturally responsive practices that centered Hawaiian values, language, community connections, and students' relationships to place. The research highlighted the importance of experiential and place-based learning that engages students with their communities and the natural environment. This approach reflects what Keehne et al. (2018) identified in their study of Hawaiian-focused charter schools. Building on work by Au, these researchers developed an Indigenous framework reflecting the work of these schools and identified five elements of culturally grounded literacy education: literacy in Indigenous languages; community connections; a shared vision encompassing culture, academic proficiency, and community; authentic assessment; and teaching grounded in culture and higher-level thinking.

Wurdeman-Thurston and Kaomea (2015) documented how culturally relevant literacy instruction can be implemented in Native Hawaiian classrooms. Their study, published in Language Arts, examined literacy instruction in a Native Hawaiian classroom and demonstrated the importance of connecting literacy instruction to students' cultural identities and lived experiences. The research showed how teachers can foster culturally relevant literacy instruction by centering Hawaiian language, stories, values, and students' experiences in their teaching. These findings resonate with the broader literature on culturally sustaining pedagogy and the importance of curriculum that reflects students' cultural backgrounds.

However, like Oregon's Tribal History/Shared History and Montana's IEFA, Hawai‘i's efforts have struggled with implementation due to insufficient resources, competing institutional priorities, and persistent systemic barriers. A 2017 Hawai‘i Department of Education report documented several challenges, including ambiguity concerning the relationship between the Governor's Blueprint and other educational initiatives, limited resources for Hawaiian education projects, schools' concerns about the demands of implementing culturally based and project-based education, and broader system barriers to implementation (Hawai‘i State Department of Education, 2017). These challenges illustrate the gap that can emerge between policy commitments and the resources and institutional structures necessary to implement them. They also echo challenges documented in Montana and Arizona, where mandates and policy commitments without adequate resources and accountability mechanisms can result in inconsistent implementation.

Teacher shortages have been a particularly acute challenge for Kaiapuni programs. Hawaiian language immersion schools have experienced growing demand from families, but the number of qualified teachers has not kept pace with that demand. Students also tend to have fewer immersion options as they progress into middle and high school, while schools face difficulty recruiting educators who possess both fluency in Hawaiian and the qualifications necessary to teach in public schools (Associated Press, 2026; Civil Beat, 2025). Because the pool of qualified Hawaiian-speaking educators is limited, some Kaiapuni teachers have taken on larger-than-average class sizes, meaning that reported vacancy rates may underestimate the number of educators needed to fully staff programs (Associated Press, 2026). Kaiapuni programs also face long-standing challenges including insufficient capacity, inadequate facilities and

curricula, limited special education services, inequities in transportation and geographic exemptions, and inconsistent administrative support (Hawai‘i State Legislature, 2025). These conditions demonstrate that increasing access to Hawaiian immersion education requires more than creating additional program spaces; it requires a sustained investment in teachers, curriculum, facilities, student services, and administrative capacity.

The legal dimensions of access to Hawaiian education have also been a subject of scholarly and judicial analysis. Eshelman (2023) examined the question of "reasonable access" to Hawaiian education in Hawai‘i's public schools. This question became particularly significant in Clarabal v. State (2019), in which the Hawai‘i Supreme Court held that Article X, Section 4 requires the State to make all reasonable efforts to provide access to Hawaiian immersion education. The Court concluded that access to Hawaiian immersion education was necessary to a program reasonably calculated to fulfill the constitutional mandate to promote the Hawaiian language. The decision therefore established that the constitutional commitment to Hawaiian education is not merely aspirational; it creates an affirmative obligation for the State to take reasonable steps to provide access to Hawaiian immersion education.

The continuing difficulty of meeting that obligation became evident in 2025, when two lawsuits were filed against the Department of Education alleging that the State had fallen short of its constitutional duty to provide families with meaningful access to Hawaiian language immersion schools (Civil Beat, 2025). The lawsuits focused on barriers including limited program capacity and waitlists. One of the cases was subsequently dropped, while the other continued to raise questions concerning the State's obligations under Article X, Section 4 (Civil Beat, 2025). These legal challenges underscore the gap that can exist between constitutional

commitments, statutory and administrative policy, and actual access to educational programs. In this respect, Hawai‘i's experience resonates with the Montana litigation examined earlier in this chapter, although the legal questions in the two states arise from different constitutional and political contexts.

The implications of Hawai‘i's experience for other states pursuing Indigenous curricular mandates, including Oregon, Montana, and Arizona, are significant. On one hand, Hawai‘i demonstrates that a constitutional mandate can provide a durable foundation for Indigenous education and that language revitalization can be a powerful vehicle for cultural resurgence. The state's commitment to Hawaiian language immersion and the Nā Hopena A‘o framework offers models for how Indigenous language, knowledge, and values can be centered in educational practice. Hawai‘i's approach stands out for its insistence that culture and language cannot be separated. Rather than treating Hawaiian culture as a discrete subject added to an otherwise conventional curriculum, the state's policies create opportunities for Hawaiian language, culture, history, and values to shape the broader educational experience.

Hawai‘i's constitutional framework also demonstrates the potential significance of judicial enforcement. Unlike a policy that merely expresses a preference for culturally responsive education, the Hawai‘i Supreme Court has interpreted Article X, Section 4 as creating an affirmative state obligation to make reasonable efforts to provide access to Hawaiian immersion education. Clarabal therefore provides an important example of how a constitutional education provision can acquire practical force through litigation. At the same time, the continuing access challenges demonstrate that judicial recognition of a constitutional obligation does not

automatically resolve the practical problems of staffing, capacity, facilities, curriculum, transportation, or student services.

On the other hand, Hawai‘i's long struggle with implementation reveals that even constitutional and policy mandates are insufficient without adequate resources, institutional capacity, enforcement mechanisms, and meaningful accountability. The persistent teacher shortages, capacity limitations, funding and resource concerns, and access inequities documented in the research underscore that policy commitments must be backed by concrete structures to ensure that they translate into classroom practice. The history of Hawaiian education also demonstrates that language revitalization requires more than formal recognition. It requires sustained investment in the people and institutions capable of transmitting language and cultural knowledge across generations.

As with Montana's IEFA and Oregon's SB 13, the work of implementing Indigenous curriculum in Hawai‘i continues. The state's constitutional and statutory framework has established a strong foundation for Hawaiian education, while the development of Hawaiian Studies, Kaiapuni, and HĀ has created multiple pathways to integrate Hawaiian knowledge into public education. Yet the continuing challenges of access, staffing, resources, and implementation demonstrate that constitutional recognition alone cannot guarantee educational transformation. Hawai‘i's experience offers both inspiration and caution for other states pursuing similar mandates, demonstrating that meaningful curricular transformation requires sustained commitment, adequate resources, institutional capacity, Indigenous community participation, and ongoing attention to the gap between policy and practice.

Summary Analysis of Examination of State Level Indigenous Curricular Efforts:

The four state cases examined in this chapter reveal both the possibilities and the persistent constraints of state-level Indigenous curriculum reform. Each emerged from decades of Indigenous advocacy and organizing. Each established some form of legal or policy mandate requiring instruction about Indigenous histories, cultures, and contemporary realities. Yet each has also encountered the enduring power of settler colonial agency, which asserts itself in different spaces and through different mechanisms, normalizing itself within educational institutions and limiting the transformative potential of even the most well-intentioned policies.

Settler colonial agency operates differently across these four contexts, but its effects are strikingly similar. In Montana, it took the form of administrative indifference and fiscal misuse. The constitutional mandate was clear, the statutory framework was established, and the funding was allocated. But for more than two decades, the state failed to enforce the mandate. Districts treated Indian Education for All funds as discretionary. The constitutional promise remained largely unfulfilled for Native and non-Native students alike. The class-action lawsuit and eventual settlement underscore that settler colonial agency does not always announce itself through overt opposition. Sometimes it operates through neglect, through the quiet refusal to enforce, through the comfortable assumption that a policy on the books is sufficient. Meaningful reform requires not merely adding Indigenous content to existing structures but transforming those structures themselves. Montana's experience demonstrates how difficult that transformation is when settler colonial agency operates through the ordinary mechanisms of institutional inertia.

In Arizona, settler colonial agency asserted itself through the broader political environment in which the mandates were embedded. The same legislature that required instruction about Native American history also restricted bilingual education and targeted ethnic

studies programs. This contradictory policy environment created a distinction between what was "safe" and what was "dangerous." Native American history could be included if it did not fundamentally challenge settler colonial narratives of Arizona's past and present. It could be added to the curriculum if it did not center tribal sovereignty, Indigenous epistemologies, or contemporary Indigenous political struggles. The failure of later legislative efforts to establish a more comprehensive framework further demonstrates the limits of what settler colonial agency will permit. Arizona's experience reveals that mandates without tribal consultation requirements and enforcement mechanisms can produce inclusion without transformation, presence without power.

In Oregon, settler colonial agency manifested as apathy, resource constraints, and the absence of accountability structures. The rollout of Tribal History/Shared History was met with immediate pushback. Districts refused to send educators to professional development trainings because they lacked funds to support time out of the classroom. Teachers expressed discomfort in leading coursework for tribal communities under conditions where they feared scrutiny. Most unexpectedly, scholars and curriculum developers encountered apathy. Administration in many districts across Oregon was indifferent to Senate Bill 13, and this indifference manifested as non-acknowledgment of the mandate. When the mandate was acknowledged, it was done in passing, which changed little for Indigenous students. The mandate lacked enforcement protocols. Nothing compelled schools to send and support educators seeking professional development opportunities. There was little outreach to non-tribal communities, so few educators knew about the mandate. There was no backlash for not adhering to the requirements. With the lack of resources and enforcement procedures, schools fell into comfortable and habituated silences on the topic of Indigeneity outside of the predetermined acknowledgments found primarily in the

month of November and through units regarding the Trail of Tears. Here, settler colonial agency operated through the ordinary rhythms of institutional life, through the prioritization of competing demands, through the comfortable silence that settles when no one is held accountable.

In Hawai'i, settler colonial agency has operated through the ongoing tension between constitutional recognition and practical access. The constitutional amendment and policy framework established a strong legal foundation for Hawaiian education. The immersion program and the Nā Hopena A'o framework created meaningful pathways for Hawaiian language and culture to shape educational practice. Yet teacher shortages, capacity limitations, inadequate facilities, limited special education services, transportation inequities, and inconsistent administrative support have persistently constrained access to Hawaiian immersion education. The lawsuits alleging that the State had fallen short of its constitutional duty to provide meaningful access demonstrate that even constitutional mandates can be undermined by the practical refusal to invest adequate resources. The courts established that the constitutional commitment is not merely aspirational, but the continuing access challenges reveal that judicial recognition of a constitutional obligation does not automatically resolve the practical problems of staffing, capacity, facilities, curriculum, transportation, or student services. Settler colonial agency in Hawai'i operates through the gap between formal recognition and material investment, through the willingness to celebrate Hawaiian culture while failing to fund the institutions that transmit it.

Across all four cases, a common pattern emerges. These policies have found purchase. They have established legal foundations, created curricular resources, and opened spaces for Indigenous knowledge within public schools. But this purchase is often short-lived or uneven in

its experience. It allows Indigenous curriculum to be additive but never transformative. Montana's IEFA added lesson plans and professional development but did not fundamentally transform how Montana's schools teach about sovereignty, land, or contemporary tribal governance until a lawsuit forced the issue. Arizona's mandates added Native American history to existing curricula but did not require tribal consultation or challenge Eurocentric frameworks. Oregon's SB 13 added essential understandings and place-based curriculum but left enforcement to the discretion of districts that often chose silence over engagement. Hawai'i's policy and immersion programs added Hawaiian language and culture to the educational landscape but have not resolved the persistent inequities in access that limit their reach.

This is the work of settler colonial agency: to permit inclusion without transformation, to allow presence without power, to celebrate diversity while maintaining the structures that produce inequality. It operates through apathy and neglect, through contradictory policies and unfunded mandates, through the comfortable silence that settles when no one is held accountable. It normalizes itself within the ordinary rhythms of institutional life, making the absence of Indigenous perspectives feel natural and the presence of Indigenous content feel like an accomplishment rather than an obligation.

And yet, the work continues. In each of these states, Indigenous communities, educators, families, and advocates continue to press for meaningful implementation. They continue to demand that policies be backed by resources, that mandates be enforced, that tribal sovereignty be centered, and that Indigenous knowledge be treated not as an addition to the curriculum but as a transformation of it. The legal victories in Montana and Hawai'i, the coalition-building documented in Oregon, and the persistent advocacy in Arizona all demonstrate that settler

colonial agency can be contested, that policies can be made more robust, and that the gap between policy and practice can be narrowed, even if it cannot be fully closed.

The stakes of this work extend beyond academic outcomes. They encompass fundamental questions about whether Indigenous students will encounter themselves and their communities reflected with accuracy, dignity, and respect in their school curricula. They also ask whether non-Indigenous students will develop the historical understanding and relational awareness needed for just and equitable coexistence on Indigenous lands. The four state cases examined in this chapter offer both inspiration and caution. They demonstrate that state-level policy can create meaningful openings for Indigenous curriculum. They also reveal that without sustained commitment, adequate resources, enforceable accountability, and meaningful Indigenous participation, those openings can be narrowed, contained, and rendered additive rather than transformative. The work of transforming public education to fully honor Indigenous histories, cultures, and sovereignty continues.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Indigenous studies in K-12 educational spaces are dynamic, complex, and shaped by more than textbooks or state standards. If these spaces could yield so easily to these forms of intervention, Indigeneity would be a more prominent feature within them. Instead, it is also influenced by communities, educators' individual comfort levels, shifting political landscapes, and often embedded protean settler colonial ideologies that seek to uphold and maintain the existing hegemony. These sources of resistance manifest in difficult-to-predict ways, from parental pushback to administrative anxieties, and reflect the fluid and protean nature of settler colonialism itself. To effectively counter these assemblages, educators need to engage with Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies, mostly through the Siletz ways of

knowing. However, it is important to engage other Indigenous knowledge systems to counter the place-based agential nature of settler colonialism. Many of these Indigenous ways of knowing emphasize relationality and reciprocity with both human and more-than-human entities. These perspectives challenge settler colonial acquisitiveness, hierarchy, and extractive logics, offering instead a knowledge system that is co-constituted with place, stories, and more-than-human relations.

This work draws on several Indigenous methodologies, including place-based knowledge, non-human/more-than-human agency, and narrative work to reframe curriculum as a living, evolving entity shaped by a complex interplay of human and more-than-human forces. Tribal Critical Race Theory (Brayboy, 2005) and survivance stories (Sabzalian, 2019) provide a framework for understanding how personal and collective narratives can disrupt and resist colonial systems and structures. These stories are not mere anecdotes, but forms of theorizing that highlight and normalize Indigenous presence and ongoing struggle in the face of a seemingly insurmountable force of settler colonialism. By centering Indigenous perspectives, this study challenges the view of curricula as static and the assumption of its banality and hegemony. As an alternative, it envisions education as a relational, place-based practice that engages the more-than-human agents operating in K-12 spaces and honors the agency of land, stories, and communities.

This study also seeks to not set up a dichotomy between Western and Indigenous theories of non-human/more-than-human agency which would put them at odds and instead engages both fields as each offers meaningful interactions with theories of agency. Using scholars like Karen Barad and their concept of intra-action to explore how settler colonialism operates as an agential force within educational systems. However, while engaging both fields offers a more dynamic

and fuller view of how agency operates, we must make critical distinctions between Western and Indigenous conceptions of agency, noting that Western theories often frame non-human agency as a loss of control or free will while Indigenous cosmologies view these relationships as liberatory and reciprocal. This divergence underscores the need for Western scholarship to engage deeply with Indigenous thought not as an assimilative or extractive practices, but as a co-equal partner in reimagining education.

Ultimately, this research calls for a transformative approach to the way we view and consider teacher education. It begins to conceptualize how we prepare educators to navigate the complexities of settler colonialism and its resistance to Indigenous curricula. By understanding curriculum as a dynamic, more-than-human assemblage, teachers can be better prepared to respond to the shifting challenges of settler colonialism and build relationships and deepen our understanding of Indigenous futurities.

This requires moving beyond additive approaches to Indigenous content and instead embracing a relational, place-based pedagogy that acknowledges non-human/more-than-human agencies. Such an approach not only disrupts settler colonial logics but also fosters a more ethical and reciprocal relationship with the more-than-human world, creating space for Indigenous knowledge systems to thrive within and beyond the classroom.

The study's central question is: What kind of teacher knowledge and practice enables substantive implementation of Indigenous studies curriculum mandates in K-12 schools? Certainly, some subject matter knowledge is needed, but what else? This question leads to other related questions, some practical and some philosophical, most notably:

- (Practical) What kind of decisions do teachers find themselves facing when seeking to teach Indigenous studies content?

- (Practical) What constituencies, political discourses, material conditions, and place-based considerations influence the implementation of this kind of curricula?
- (Practical) How does a teacher's relation with families, community groups, institutions, other teachers, and students support or hinder the implementation of this kind of curriculum?
- (Philosophical) What are the boundaries between the curricula and the place in which it is being taught?

    *If, as I anticipate, that boundary is fluid, then how does Indigenous studies curricula avoid being assimilated into pervasive settler colonial discourses? Or, to put this more precisely, what forms does Indigenous studies curricular survivance take?

(Practical and philosophical) What is the nature and content of the knowledge that enables teachers to do this work? Is it knowledge of subject matter content? Knowledge of the community? Or perhaps a distributed form of knowing–a knowledge with the community?

Chapter 3: Methodology

More-Than-Human Agency Complicating Methodology:

A conventional approach to researching Indigenous curriculum might take the form of an implementation study: identifying best practices, measuring consistency and adherence to a prescribed model, or evaluating outcomes against predetermined metrics. Such research asks whether a given curriculum "works" and seeks to identify the barriers to its successful adoption. This framing, while familiar within educational research, would fundamentally distort the nature of the problem.

The impulse toward implementation research presumes that the challenge of Indigenous education is primarily one of content delivery; that if we could only identify the right materials, the right sequence, the right training, then the problem would be solved. This assumption treats curriculum as a stable object that moves unchanged from developer to classroom, from policy document to pedagogical practice. It renders invisible the relational, place-based, and deeply contextual nature of Indigenous knowledge: stories that cannot be told out of season, knowledge that emerges through protocols of respect, learning that happens through connection to land and ancestors rather than through the transmission of discrete content.

More fundamentally, an implementation framing would render the work of bringing Indigenous studies into K-12 classrooms too prescriptively. It would reduce complex, ongoing, and fundamentally relational work to a set of technical problems with prescriptive solutions. It would position Indigenous knowledge as content to be packaged, disseminated, and assessed, precisely the extraction that Indigenous communities have long warned against. And it would leave unexamined the deeper questions: What conditions enable ethical engagement with

Indigenous knowledge? What does a teacher need to understand in order to make good judgments in the moment? How do place and circumstance shape what becomes possible?

Reconceptualizing Curriculum as Entangled Assemblage

This study therefore refuses the separation that implementation research presumes. It does not treat "political context" and "curriculum" as distinct entities that influence one another from a distance. It does not position the teacher as a neutral conduit through which content passes on its way to students. And it does not imagine that "Indigenous content" can be cleanly identified, extracted, and inserted into existing structures.

Instead, this research begins from the recognition that there is no clear boundary between a teacher as a person, the place they are in, the political and cultural influences on their thought and affect, and the content of children's education. All of these are in constant motion. All of them merit being considered the "curriculum."

This reconceptualization draws on scholarship that understands curriculum not as a document or a plan, but as a living practice; what Clandinin and Connelly (1992) termed "curriculum as lived experience," or what Pinar (1975) described as currere: the running of the course, the ongoing process of educational experience. In this framing, curriculum is not something teachers deliver; it is something that happens through the complex entanglement of persons, places, materials, histories, and relationships. The political context that shapes what teachers feel permitted to say and do, the professional norms that determine what counts as "good teaching," the land upon which a school sits and the histories it holds, the affective responses that arise when difficult knowledge is encountered, the materials available and those conspicuously absent, these are not factors influencing curriculum from the outside. They are the curriculum.

To take this reconceptualization seriously requires a methodological shift. If curriculum is not located solely in documents, nor solely in teachers' minds, nor solely in classroom interactions, but emerges through the entanglement of all these elements and more, then the unit of analysis must shift as well.

This study draws on theories of non-human agency to permit this shift. Karen Barad's (2007) concept of "agential realism" suggests that agency is not a property possessed by human subjects but emerges through what she calls "intra-action": the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. In this framing, the boundary between human and non-human, between subject and object, is not given but produced through specific material-discursive practices. Jane Bennett (2010) similarly argues for an understanding of "vibrant matter" in which non-human entities (things, materials, environments) possess their own forms of agency that shape what becomes possible. Bruno Latour's (2005) actor-network theory provides another vocabulary for tracing how agency is distributed across human and non-human actors, including documents, objects, spaces, and technologies.

For this study, these theories enable a crucial shift. Rather than asking what content should be taught about Indigenous peoples, or what pedagogical strategies would be most effective, the research asks: How do place and circumstance influence such decisions? What does a teacher need to know and understand in order to be able to make good judgments? These questions are not about content delivery; they are about the conditions that enable ethical engagement.

This shift matters because it refuses to locate the problem of Indigenous education solely in teachers' knowledge or skills, or in the content of curriculum documents, or solely in policy frameworks. Instead, it recognizes that agency for change is distributed across a complex

assemblage: the teacher, certainly, but also the land upon which the school sits, the stories that carry their own protocols and requirements, the seasonal cycles that determine when certain knowledge can be shared, the ancestors whose presence is not metaphorical but real, the materials that invite or resist certain kinds of engagement.

Teacher Knowledge and Distributed Agency

This reconceptualization has implications for how we understand teacher knowledge. The literature on teacher knowledge, from Shulman's (1986, 1987) foundational work on pedagogical content knowledge to Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) attention to teachers' personal practical knowledge to Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1999) exploration of knowledge-of-practice has long recognized that teaching involves far more than the possession of content expertise. Teachers must understand how to translate knowledge into pedagogy, how to read classroom contexts, how to respond to the particular students before them.

Yet even this literature tends to locate knowledge in the individual teacher. The assumption is that if teachers possess the right knowledge, they will be able to act. But the theories of non-human agency I am drawing on suggest that knowledge cannot be easily considered just a set of concepts possessed by a teacher alone. The teacher is not the primary location of the agency for change that we seek.

What Indigenous education requires is that teachers understand how to become part of agencies larger than themselves, communities and traditions of practice that extend beyond the individual. It requires them to learn how to be guided by protocols they did not create, to defer to knowledge keepers whose authority does not derive from academic credentials, to allow the land itself to teach. And it requires them to recognize the harmful distributed agencies they may unknowingly be entangled with: discourses that romanticize Indigenous culture while avoiding

difficult histories, ideologies that treat knowledge as property to be extracted, and institutional structures that render Indigenous presence a performance rather than a transformation.

This is not a matter of acquiring more knowledge, but of understanding how to participate ethically in knowledge systems that exceed the individual. A teacher who gathers local plants with community members, participating in protocols of respect and reciprocity, is not simply transmitting information about plant biology. They are participating in a relationship with land, ancestors, and more-than-human dynamics that have been ongoing for generations. A teacher who invites an elder into a classroom is not simply facilitating a guest presentation. They are entering into a relationship of responsibility and reciprocity with a knowledge keeper and the community they represent. These are not skills that can be trained in isolation; they are practices that emerge through ongoing engagement with communities and traditions.

If teachers must learn to navigate distributed agencies, how are they to evaluate the worth of these different agencies? How do they determine which entanglements to embrace and which to resist?

This study proposes that such evaluation is less about whether different agencies' internal accounts of events are singularly accurate; less about whether a particular story about Indigenous history is "true" in some objective sense, and more about the futurities they promise to enable. What futures do these agencies open? What futures do they foreclose?

Consider the contrast between two approaches to incorporating Indigenous content. One approach treats Indigenous cultures as static, pre-contact artifacts to be studied and preserved; a framing that locates Indigenous presence firmly in the past and implicitly positions settler colonialism as an accomplished fact. This approach promises a future in which Indigenous peoples are remembered but not encountered, studied but not in relationship, mourned but not

present. The other approach engages Indigenous knowledge as living, contemporary, and emergent. This approach promises a future in which Indigenous peoples are partners in education, in which knowledge emerges through relationship, in which the land itself is recognized as a teacher.

The criterion is not which account is more factually accurate, but which futurity it enables. Does this way of engaging Indigenous knowledge open possibilities for relationship, for reciprocity, for justice? Or does it reproduce the extractive logics that have always characterized settler engagement with Indigenous peoples?

This is what distinguishes the "romanticized" approach that schools often prefer from the more complex, difficult, and generative engagement that ethical Indigenous education requires. The romanticized approach promises a future in which Indigenous peoples remain safely in the past, their presence reduced to beautiful moccasins and ceremonial performances that can be appreciated without requiring transformation. The complex approach promises a future in which Indigenous knowledge is living, in which students learn to be in relationship with land and ancestors, in which education becomes a practice of repair rather than a reproduction of harm.

Implications for This Study

This methodological framing shapes every aspect of the research. It means that I am not asking what curriculum should be taught, or how to train teachers to deliver it, or how to measure its effectiveness. I am asking how place and circumstance influence the decisions teachers make about Indigenous education; what teachers need to know and understand to make good judgments; how they learn to become part of agencies larger than themselves; and how they evaluate the futurities that different distributed agencies promise to enable.

These questions cannot be answered through implementation research. They require attention to the entanglement of persons, places, histories, and materials. They require recognizing that the land, the stories, and the ancestors are not outside the curriculum, they are always already a part of it. They require understanding that the goal of research is not to produce knowledge about Indigenous education from a position of extraction, but to participate in the ongoing work of creating conditions for ethical engagement.

This work cannot be reduced to a formula. There is no set of best practices that can be extracted and applied elsewhere. There is only the ongoing, place-based, relational work of learning to listen (to the land, to the stories, to the ancestors, to the communities who have been caring for this knowledge since time immemorial). This study seeks to honor that work by refusing to render it too prescriptively, too narrowly, too simply. It seeks instead to understand the complex conditions that enable good judgment, and to contribute to the ongoing conversation about what it means to teach and learn in relationship with Indigenous peoples, lands, and knowledges.

Edgewalking as Methodology:

When I consider what it means for the research I engage with to be relational and naming these relationships in ways that are legible to me as an Indigenous person, as well as build legibility with the academy, and challenge myself to maintain a positive relationship with my Siletz, as a people and the knowledge systems I am attempting to represent, the task seems daunting. I begin by exploring the methodological literature that addresses the status of a researcher as a simple binary, insider or outsider, in the communities they study, which I find to be well-sedimented and relatively large. This review took me to Merton's (1972) reflections on ethnography and his introduction of the dichotomy of emic (insider) and etic (outsider)

perspectives. When I turn my attention to the education literature, I found James Banks' (1998) widely cited but only slightly more complex four-tiered system for thinking about these matters. He suggested insider status doesn't just have to do with membership in a community, but also the mindset one brings to the research. His four categories are as follows: Indigenous-Insider, Indigenous-Outsider, External-Insider, and External-Outsider. Banks defines the Indigenous Insider as:

> *[an] individual who endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her Indigenous community and culture and is perceived by people within the community as a legitimate community member who can speak with authority about it*. (pg. 8)

While a step in the correct direction, this perspective feels extractive and unkind to the community I am a part of and to whom my research and work hope to create meaningful, Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogical (McCarty & Lee, 2014) work alongside. I kept stumbling on the shortcomings of the emic (*insideness*) and etic (*outsideness*) framing (Harris, 1976). When I consider what it means to navigate relationships as complex as these with integrity and care, I find them to be inadequate.

Given the inadequacy of the traditional terms (which, honestly, seem like they were developed primarily from the perspective of researchers who are outsiders to the communities they study), I turn to contemporary Indigenous scholars who write critically about qualitative research and think deeply about how Indigenous scholars are in relationship to academia. One of the most compelling theorizations of the work of doing academic research in one's own community is Tupuola's (2004) idea of "edgewalking." This term is in reference to existing on the periphery or in the margins of often conflicting identities and treating this position as a space

of resistance and a place of possibility (hooks, 1990) and existing on this edge as a means of drawing attention to its existence and the inherent flaws within those delineations. What does it mean for a researcher to stand at the "edge" and conduct research that challenges the very framework of "insider" or "outsider", and that a scholar conducting research must plant their feet firmly in one of these two worlds, in hopes of not complicating either? As Beals et al captures "There are times when researchers occupy the edge, or margin, between multiple worlds and perspectives, and we want to problematize a tendency we have observed in some social sciences research where insider and outsider positions are represented as a simple opposition" (Beals et al., 2020, pg. 593). As a Siletz man and a scholar conducting research within a Siletz context, but with skills and tools gained from an academic background, I find myself identifying with the frame provided by the term "edgewalker."

In the context of my identity as a Siletz man, the framework of "edgewalker" is as meaningful and identifiable as being an "edgewalker" within the academy. While I am never able to shed my identity and remove the lived experiences I grew up with, that identity becomes complicated with my burgeoning identity as a scholar of the university that is more often read by my home community on the Siletz reservation. My identity within this community is complicated because a Siletz person goes through extensive "authentication" by members of my home community (Webber, 2009). This places me at the perceived "edge" of these multiple identities, which conflict with each other when conducting research. But, again, this is not also without the added benefit of being aware of how these systems of authentication, which challenge my status as a "real" Siletz person, operate to maintain a hegemony of my own Indigenous community. This authentication comes with questions impossible to answer: "If you're from here, why did you leave?" or "What have you done for your community from the University?" Questions that do not

come in the form of sincere inquiry but instead seek to invalidate my place within the community. Responses to these challenges could never be sufficient as the questions themselves are not intended to be answered; instead, they are used to keep me on the periphery of my identity in relation to the Siletz community.

Alongside this engagement with my Siletz identity, I do not shed my identity as a researcher any more than I shed my identity as an Indigenous person. The complexity of identity is not one that is as simple as trading out aspects of myself and performing and stripping away pieces to appease a perceived audience. Edgewalking instead frames how I am a part of all of these identities, and how through maintenance of them, and the refusal to simply allow identity to give way to context complicates the center; the center being the systems that protect the perceived status quo of both my identity as an Indigenous person as well as my identity as a scholar. The systems that speak to what a scholar is and what they do, as well as those from reservation communities essentialize what it means to be a Siletz person. By calling attention to the treatment of those who exist upon the edge of these communities and have little to no interest in occupying the center or in being completely legible to either, this framework instead allows me to muddle the perception of the role that essentializing perception of identity plays.

The notion of standing in this space of irreconcilability, acknowledging the limitations of my positionality but the benefits it affords, brings the conversation back to the challenge of engaging in research as edgewalking. Edgewalking challenges simplistic binaries, such as emic and etic perspectives and insider/outsider categories of identity and displaces them with something more complex and ethically nuanced. “As people who started from the margins, we can never really occupy the center completely, nor is this necessarily our aspiration. Instead, our ability to stand on the edge and hold onto our own identities while speaking from the margins of the academy

to the center enables us, as researchers, to create bridges between the space of research (academia) and the place of research" (Beals et al., 2021, pg. 599-600). Edgewalking, in this regard, calls attention to where those edges exist and, by extension, where the places of meaningful connections can be made. Often framed as unfortunate, but a place I am comfortable existing within, this also means that I do not exist fully at the center of the academy. Alongside my position as an academic, I am a representative of and, in many ways, pushed to the margins of my own identity as an Indigenous person: the subject of potential exoticization from one and the subject of suspicion from the other. This awareness, in many ways, is heartbreaking and challenges my desire to stand in this contention until I see youth I have worked with making the leap, joining me at this very university, and sharing stories and hope. I am thus reminded that standing in this gap, on the edge of these worlds, and building these bridges is not a move that has to benefit me but instead is an action that enables this option for future generations.

From the academy's perspective, my presence as an edgewalker allows me to "throw new light on the way cultural or ethnic worldviews are perceived" (Funaki, 2017, p. 31). More meaningfully, my perspective as an edgewalker acknowledges the necessity for moving into my home community with integrity and care.

Data Collection:

This collaborative project was a vital partnership with and in direct service to the Siletz community. It engaged deeply with community members, not merely to gather data, but to ensure the research process actively addressed and supported the needs and priorities of the community.

Building on this foundation, the next phase of data collection included: 1) in-depth individual interviews, this allowed for educators, community members, and administrators to reflect on their experiences with SB 13.

This comprehensive approach ensured the research not only captured the complexities of implementation but also amplified the voices and perspectives of the Siletz community, fostering meaningful and actionable outcomes.

These interviews centered on the decisions participants made regarding the inclusion of Indigenous studies content in the curriculum of Siletz's K-12 schools. Once these decisions were identified, the focus shifted to examining the influences shaping them and the competencies that enabled teachers to respond constructively. Special attention was given to how specific curricular ideas and ideals were repeatedly reinforced, often emerging from seemingly distinct sources.

The goal was that "a number of different methods of data collection are possible as the researcher and the practitioner work together in a collaborative relationship" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.5). Operating with this understanding of the collaborative process in place, the above data collection was fluid and allowed for responsiveness to community input and desires regarding the role of the research. The data collection therefore leaned into this fluidity via semi-structured interviews and one-on-one and group discussions on the subject of the implementation of an Indigenous-centered curriculum from participants who were interested in this form of engagement.

Observation portions of the research revolved around classrooms implementing the Indigenous-centered (ideally Oregon Senate Bill 13) curriculum, board meetings, and other

spaces where the discussion of curriculum and classrooms occurred. I used these opportunities to observe three things. First, how was the curriculum being discussed by the community (students, teachers, parents, board members, etc.)? When I observed a board meeting discussing the struggles of implementing an Indigenous-centered curriculum into STEM coursework, what was the tone of the conversation: one of treating the curriculum as an imposition or one of opportunity to engage and assist with that implementation? I focused this observation on how the community received the curriculum/the notion of an Indigenous-centered curriculum. Was there pushback? What was the tone of that pushback? If there was acceptance, how was that acceptance supported? Etc.

Secondly, following the work in classrooms, what did resistance to the Indigenous curriculum look like? How were settler colonial ideologies defending the status quo of a Eurocentric curriculum or adapting the Indigenous-centered curriculum to recenter settler colonialism? These adaptations or defenses of the status quo came in the form of material and discursive engagement that was produced from either the planned or enacted curriculum that continued to center settler futurities in academic spaces in ways that hindered the available possibilities of representation of Indigenous people. This was represented by the recentering of these futurities by the minimizing of the importance of Indigenous representation in STEM fields and the pushback by community members against discussing more contemporary Indigenous realities (Idle No More, DAPL, ICWA, etc.). How did support for the curriculum shift when the realities of the curriculum began to make substantive change? How did that reception or support turn? For example, in a previous publication I wrote with a co-author that;

> *Once the "inclusion" of Indigenous experience becomes substantive, once the transformative philosophical, moral, and metaphysical implications of Indigenous history and survivance is understood, or even suspected, the reception of such curricula often changes. It moves from being embraced as a welcome addition to being resented and resisted as a burden and insult. More problematically, this resistance takes many forms, so it is difficult to anticipate.* (2024, p.22)

For the purposes of this project, form of "curriculum" was more than simply the artifacts presented in the lesson: it was more than the handouts, PowerPoints, reading, etc. We had to discuss curriculum as the complex assemblage of community affect, career anxieties, and cultural expectations (both real and perceived), as well as how the curriculum was presented (enacted), experienced, and assessed. Moreover, how was the lived curriculum received by students and community members (Rosiek & Clandinin, 2019)? Were there attempts to soften or complicate discussion?

For the third observation, how did the community (teachers, students, community members, etc.) respond to the dynamics as they shifted during the implementation of the curriculum? Did people within the community acknowledge that the curriculum appeared and was responded to differently? That the curriculum necessitated breaking away from comfortable learned practices within education that centered settler futurities/ideologies (even if not recognized in name, but in outcome)? How/Why did this transformative curriculum, which centered the Siletz community and Indigenous identity in its complexity, feel foreign and, in that sense, require the community to be flexible in its reception to allow for that difference to be felt? Moreover, how did the community support a transgressive curriculum which centered

Indigenous people, rather than settler colonialism? How were these transgressions felt, and how did the existing structures and community shift to accommodate the anxieties? In doing so, did they push Indigenous identity back to the margins as another racialized group to be spoken about in passing, even in a community surrounded by Indigenous identity looking for a place within the academic ethos? Did these shifts, which recentered colonial identity, escape the eye of the community, or were they addressed? The subtlety with which settler colonial interests subsumed efforts to decolonize curriculum was staggering and, as was stated above, difficult to anticipate, so this was not an engagement that might have come through materially but instead discursively.

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, I used a framework of more-than-human empiricism to analyze and code instances of these moments of reasserting settler colonial futurities, as well as defending a perceived status quo. The intent, however, was not only to capture these moments of settler colonial agency, but also to capture the forms of agency that were constructive and sought amelioration: forms of agency that could lead to more dynamic and meaningful futurities. As previously stated, the goals of the study were to better understand the shifting, protean, and agential nature of curriculum/settler colonialism as not simply one thing. Instead, it was better understood as an assemblage of parental affect, administrative anxieties, popular political discourse, institutional power relations, and a perception of what curriculum was supposed to be. This assemblage, although seemingly a collection of disparate elements, had coherence in the context of an Indigenous curriculum; it functioned to silence teaching that centered Indigenous experience and knowledge, even as the study documented counter-agencies that operated to support this work. This study thus sought moments of this coherence, moments in which this

complex assemblage aimed to defend the status quo at the cost of a more robust Indigenous curriculum.

The study identified and analyzed moments that reinscribed curricular and settler-colonial hegemony, with attention to their intended outcomes and how these assemblages justified the reconstitution of settler futurity. These moments were also examined in relation to settler colonialism's capacity to adapt when its curricular dominance was challenged. Similar forms of adaptability appeared in related cases, including the persistence of racism and the reinforcement of structures that upheld rigid norms. Michelle Alexander (2010), a non-Indigenous scholar, described this protean, agential quality:

> *Any candid observer of American racial history must acknowledge that racism is highly adaptable. The rules and reasons the political system employs to enforce status relations of any kind, including racial hierarchy, evolve and change as they are challenged. The valiant efforts to abolish slavery and Jim Crow and to achieve greater racial equality have brought about significant changes in the legal framework of American society, new "rules of the game," so to speak. These new rules have been justified by new rhetoric, new language, and a new social consensus, while producing many of the same results* (p. 21).

In my case, I conducted a study framed by contemporary theories of more-than-human agency to study teacher and community conversations about the implementation of state-mandated Indigenous studies curriculum. I analyzed this data using a combination of close reading techniques that looked at the way participants represented their relation and investment in the curriculum in question. I also undertook a critical discursive analysis of policy documents, public

meeting conversations, and interviews with local education leaders to identify broader patterns in the movement of curriculum priorities and actions.

Modality of Representation of Data

I represented data gathered during this process as a first-person narrative (as noted above). From the outset, I wanted to make clear that this study interpreted data from my own perspective, and I did my best to represent the events and the experiences recounted to me with integrity. I offered as much of the community's voice and thoughts as possible to represent their perspectives accurately, but I could not and therefore did not promise that I provided a view that transcended my own relational embeddedness in this world and community, as I did not believe that to be possible. Upon completion of this work, the community members were to receive a draft to clarify or share aspects of the work which they felt were not for the general public and were instead knowledge reserved for the Siletz community.

The primary audience for this dissertation was scholars, particularly those in the fields of Indigenous studies and curriculum studies, followed by teacher education scholars. This work was firmly rooted in the knowledge traditions of these disciplines by engaging with their frameworks while also challenging and expanding them in constructive ways.

However, it was equally important to me that this research held value and accessibility for Indigenous community members. While the academic rigor and theoretical depth of the dissertation were essential, I was committed to ensuring that the findings were meaningful and legible to the communities at the heart of this study. At the very least, I provided a clear and concise summary of the research that resonated with Indigenous audiences, ensuring that the

knowledge generated contributed not only to academic discourse but also to the lived experiences and aspirations of Indigenous peoples.

Previously stated priorities could be accomplished by using a posthumanist empiricist framework, which sought to understand a counter-agency to settler colonialism that engaged the whole of the community as an aspect of curriculum rather than the simplistic approach of believing that curriculum was just things in the classroom that educators had to attend to in an effort to minimize its impact in implementing an Indigenous curriculum.

Chapter 4: Case Studies/Kora

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with educators, both cultural knowledge keepers who view a fundamental aspect of their cultural engagements to be passing that knowledge down for future generations and formal educators carrying a similar view of their role with several profound distinctions. Both do brilliant work but oftentimes speak about that work as coinciding rather than coalescing. The goal of this chapter is to lay out narratives which characterize this dynamic; where educators have a desire to engage in Indigenous centered work, cultural holders share a desire to work alongside a school in an area that by all accounts should be open and eager to explore those connections, but the enacted curriculum; the public pedagogy and complicated, protean, and imbricated ways in which curriculum operates at a school, community, and state level, often fails to account for these complications.

This chapter is organized to orient the reader to the case studies and the themes they articulate, which emerge from these semi-structured interviews. These themes will not account for all potential roadblocks that may arise during attempts to engage with Indigenous-centered curriculum. Instead, these case studies will illustrate the ways the understanding that curricular implementation is complicated when it runs counter to the goals of settler-colonial ideologies and futurities. Although all of the participants are willing to engage in the work, they struggle against the thrall of settler colonialism in different ways, whether by working through their personal affective resistance, anxieties, and fear of inadequacies; by responding to community pushback and political polarization; or simply by lacking the resources to facilitate implementation of the curricula meaningfully (to name a few).

I will conclude this chapter with a more general observation about the processes that participants said limited their engagement, the perspectives they shared on potential solutions,

and the general hopefulness of cultural knowledge holders and classroom educators in the face of structural, often shifting challenges to centering Indigenous histories, presence, and futures.

Context of Case Studies

As stated in previous chapters, this work attempts to better understand the impediments that arose to the passing of Senate Bill 13: Tribal History/Shared History, which passed in 2017, the goal of SB 13 provides direct funding and resources to the state's nine federally recognized tribes to develop K–12 curriculum that integrates Native American history, sovereignty, and culture across all subject areas (English language arts, math, science, health, and the arts), not just social studies. Since the passing of SB 13, several statewide professional development programs have emerged; however, despite state-level efforts, initiatives among tribes and independent organizations to improve accessibility and build teachers' confidence and efficacy with the materials, many educators still share critiques of the rollout and highlight where they have seen potential.

The interviews that were conducted for the purposes of this research centered around two potential lines of inquiry, which were developed based on their roles and relationship to the material. Formal classroom teachers were given questions that centered around stories of success and struggle. They were also asked about their own feelings around the existing curriculum, opportunities to engage in trainings that felt meaningful for their own growth, and access to materials that felt comfortable and provided enough background for them to feel confident implementing it. They were asked about moments where they experience student pushback, community pushback, or the inverse as well as student or community excitement at this opportunity to see Indigenous identity, sovereignty, and presence expressed in their classrooms. As stated above, these were semi-structured interviews, so the interviewer pursued lines of

inquiry where it felt appropriate and where the teachers showed excitement to share experiences or frustrations.

The other potential line of inquiry focused on culture bearers, community members, and administration. This is where it becomes necessary to note that these categories were not discreet: many interviewees held different positions, so their answers required more openness and fluidity than even this semi-structured interview could facilitate. Using best judgement, the interviewer moved between the two lines of questions where appropriate, where the interviewee seemed most likely to share topics that were relevant to the research, and where they seemed compelled to engage in deep conversation. In the lines of questioning focused on culture-bearing, community members were focused on their goals and aspirations, how they envisioned Indigenous identity being present in K-12 spaces, and perceived challenges and precarities around cultural practice that may be disrespected in traditional schooling.

Case Study #1: Kora - Squeamishness, Discomfort, and Naming the Silencing

I arrived at Siletz Valley School a little early, stepped into the familiar hallways, and felt an odd ping of nostalgia - both as a graduate and former teacher at the school. I looked at the pictures hanging on the walls, smelled the musk of hallways that had spent time earlier that day bustling with life, and was quickly greeted by an unofficial welcoming committee of curious staff. They stepped out, and I told them my name and who my family was. The suddenly pulled me into a conversation about cultural practice and ongoing work in the community, which was accompanied by boisterous laughter. Kora approached from down the hall and seamlessly joined in on the conversation.

Kora and I had met prior to my reaching out for an interview, so we were able to move quickly beyond casual small talk; her excitement was evident when she showed me to her

classroom. We entered a large, open area with stations for collaborative work and bookshelves filled with literature by diverse scholars, including some recent books she was eager to discuss. Our conversation focused on *There, There* by Tommy Orange, as she was centering the book in one of her classes. It turns out that I had met Tommy Orange in a previous role I had as an educator in the Portland metro area. The walls were adorned with welcoming decor, including LGBTQIA+ flags, sentence-stem exemplars, and encouraging quotes.

Without much preamble, I asked her what she considered to be the strengths and weaknesses of the SB 13 mandate, as well as how comfortable she felt engaging with curriculum that centers Indigenous identity as a white teacher in a school with a large proportion of Indigenous students. She noted that some of her biggest early successes were simply visiting the Oregon Department of Education's (ODE) website and exploring the lessons that the nine federally recognized tribes of Oregon were commissioned to create. She commented on the number of lessons available on the website; however, as she explored, she quickly became disillusioned, but not by the material. She commented,

> They have a lot of breadth there, but they do not necessarily have a lot of depth…we're talking about a lot of standalone activities that are actually hard to weave through in a meaningful way…Because it's literally a 40-minute lesson, you show how important something is by how much time you prioritize for it, and if all I can give them is a 40-minute lesson and then we move on…that feels more performative than anything" (1:32-2:27).

This captures some shared and grounded frustrations experienced by educators that would be difficult to anticipate at the state level. Although grateful for the resources to create curriculum, much of it was developed as standalone pieces that struggled to gain traction within a system not designed to create space for them.

Kora's initial experience with the ODE resources thus encapsulates a broader structural bind. The lessons, created in partnership with the nine federally recognized tribes of Oregon,

were undeniably valuable in their content, yet the system in which they landed had not been redesigned to give them depth. Well-intentioned educators found themselves caught between gratitude for the materials and the uneasy realization that slotting a forty-minute lesson into an otherwise unchanged curriculum felt more superficial than transformative.

That unease was compounded by a hesitancy to adapt the lessons, rooted in a genuine respect for the tribal nations and ODE that had invested in them. Teachers worried that altering or discarding pieces might signal disrespect, and this anxiety only deepened when they searched for longer anchor texts and discovered that several prominent Indigenous authors have recently come under serious scrutiny. The result was a pedagogical paralysis: a fear of getting it wrong, of being superficial, or of inadvertently doing harm. These sentiments, however well-intentioned, settled into a silence not unlike the erasure the policy was meant to disrupt.

Well-Intentioned, Well-Positioned, Anxiety-Ridden? What Kora's account makes clear is that such paralysis is not simply a logistical problem of time, resources, or even authorial vetting. Running beneath these surface frustrations is a deeper affective current, one that she experienced directly when she finally found and attended a professional development session dedicated to SB 13. In that room, the curriculum itself had to take a back seat to the emotional work of helping white educators sit with their own guilt, squeamishness, and discomfort. Kora's experience illustrates something important, the way settler fragility operates not only as an individual reaction but as an ecosystem of avoidance that shapes boardroom rhetoric, stalls administrative follow-through, and ultimately protects settler comfort at the expense of Indigenous presence.

So, well-intentioned and ideally positioned educators who could meaningfully implement the curriculum are left with pieces of meaningful curriculum on which to build, but may lack the

background knowledge to flesh out the pieces into a full unit. Kora would be inspired but ultimately abandon the available curriculum for one she herself would develop. She was not alone in this. This feeling of not wanting to disrespect materials, and the notion that the nine tribes of Oregon and ODE had placed meaningful resources into building them, created a sense of hesitancy to adapt, shift, and discard materials as necessary to make them fit student needs. This hesitancy has been shared at many professional development lessons and school board meetings that I've personally attended. Many educators feel anxious about finding substantive anchor texts for larger units that could give more presence to Indigenous topics. This anxiety is reinforced by the struggle to find contemporary Indigenous authors when those that are well-known have come under scrutiny.[5]

These concerns bolster educators' discomfort and stoke claims that they lack the proper background knowledge to implement SB 13 materials, an anxiety that, while not given by Kora, she expressed empathy for. Referencing a brief training on SB 13 that she was able to find and attend (she did not specify if the Siletz Valley School helped her find this training), she mentioned that while the training was helpful, much of it had to focus on white fragility[6]:

[5] In recent years, several prominent Indigenous writers and cultural figures have faced allegations that complicate their suitability for classroom use. Sherman Alexie, once a mainstay of secondary and post-secondary Indigenous literature curricula, was accused in 2018 by multiple women of sexual harassment; he acknowledged causing harm and subsequently withdrew from many public engagements, leading schools and publishers to reconsider his work. Buffy Sainte-Marie's claimed Cree ancestry has been challenged by a 2023 CBC investigation, which presented genealogical evidence suggesting she was born to Italian-American parents; the controversy has unsettled her long-standing status as a celebrated Indigenous artist, and many educators now approach her work with caution. Thomas King's Cherokee identity has similarly been called into question, with a 2023 investigation finding no documented Cherokee lineage and raising concerns about authenticity in his widely taught novels. These cases underscore a deeper tension in implementing SB 13: even when educators attempt to center Indigenous voices, the landscape of Indigenous authorship is not immune to questions of identity fraud, harm, and contested belonging, making the work of selecting texts ethically fraught and reinforcing the anxieties Kora and her colleagues describe.

[6] Referring here to both the white fragility as it manifested in specific white educators feeling uncomfortable discussing the realities of Indigenous dispossession, ethnocide, and violent erasure, as well as discomfort at the possibility of teaching it "incorrectly." White fragility in this context also operates at a structural level, under the guise of equity and fairness it centers white discomfort which discussing the realities of Indigenous history.

> Basically, everybody [who] was taking the training had to do a lot of introspection about who are you? Where are you from? Where are you in your journey of…trying to talk to students who are in the culture that you're teaching if you're not in that culture? - Honestly, it was helping white people process the guilt, and the squeamishness, and the discomfort. (6:27-6:59).

A session intended to build capacity and deepen understanding of SB 13 had to double as a therapeutic space, absorbing the very affective response the policy had overlooked as a barrier to its own implementation.

Herein lies the paradox: the educators tasked by policymakers, ODE, and the nine tribes of Oregon with breaking the silences around Indigenous erasure, presence, and futures were themselves products of those sedimented silences. They had never been given tools to effectively challenge habituated silences. Many were educated in the very systems of erasure that pushed BIPOC identities to the periphery, and no legislative mandate, however comprehensive, could fully prepare them for the discomfort of challenging such an embedded hegemony. What surfaces in professional development sessions forced to center teacher discomfort, and what appears in board meetings where white students' sense of belonging masks deeper anxieties, points to more than individual fragility. It points to an ecosystem of avoidance, one that protects settler comfort at the expense of Indigenous presence.

White fragility and the myth of objectivity, especially when navigating identity-centered curriculum, were recurring themes, particularly in a school with such a prominent connection to Indigenous culture and a community that has every right to demand that identity be represented. Bringing representation and culture into a space that has historically marginalized those identities inherently calls attention to the illusory nature of objectivity in education. By attempting to break silences without drawing attention to their causes, educators have violated the stated goal of objectivity, seeking comfort in the unaddressed erasure of those stories. However, even in a

place that, at first glance, would seem open to a curriculum emphasizing Indigeneity, Kora references a blasé attitude about SB 13 from a former superintendent, stating,

> Principal will mention, like 'oh, hey, put something from Tribal History/Shared History (SB 13) on your curriculum' … and then there is no real follow-through, like, what did you do? Was it meaningful or do you need professional development on this topic? I feel like nobody's tracking that." (13:20–14:19).

So, while administrators know the policy exists, the failure to try to meaningfully implement it is still pervasive, leading to frustration from people who are passionate about this policy. As such, people become aware of the administration's propensity to performatively engage the curriculum rather than encouraging its implementation to be transformative. These forms of avoidance show an inherent discomfort with a curriculum that communicates a need for a fundamental change in our understanding of history and society. This discomfort fuels a desire for the SB13 curricular content to be additive, to add to the existing narratives of relentless social progress. and Settler innocence. Such additive approaches to curricula about Indigenous peoples limit its ability to bring Indigenous experience fully into the conversation. It also limits its ability to prepare a new generation to invent ways to stop the continuing genocide of Indigenous peoples and maybe even reverse that pattern.

While this anemic approach to the SB 13 mandate is certainly pervasive, Kora noted another example of white fragility: the school board's dismissiveness of Indigenous visibility. She describes one particularly pointed example:

> [T]here was an iteration of our school board in which the school board chair, whenever he got a chance, wanted to make it very clear that this wasn't just a tribal school, that we need to make white kids feel welcome and belong here too. It was like this thing that he had, and I go to all the school board meetings, so, like, I heard it often enough that I'm like, oh, you got a, you got a little chip on your shoulder (57:06–58:10).

The same fragility that led administrators to treat SB 13 as a box to check appears to resurface within the school board, particularly among the chair, under the guise of objectivity and the presumption that an emphasis on Native presence is a threat to neutrality. Of course, the Board member is right, Native presence is a threat to neutrality; at least if neutrality is understood as something that will not make anyone, including white students, feel uncomfortable. Historical and social truths, however, don't work that way.

Kora gave a third example of this same benevolent white innocence/fragility: an unspoken sense of entitlement that surfaced not only in her interview but also in the attempt to address those entitlements, a point that will come up in the interview with Keith. However, the form of entitlement discussed by Kora was not one of students clamoring for Indigenous insights or of the administration feeling entitled to the resources of their Indigenous staff; instead, it took the form of administrative overstep. Kora recounted an instance in which she and her colleagues were in a professional development (PD) session on Trauma-Informed Care, specifically intergenerational trauma. During the PD, she was paired with an administrator (who has since been removed from her role due to highly publicized "cultural insensitivities"); during the discussion, Kora verbalized candid frustrations:

> I got stuck with that admin [released admin], she went on a rant about how…one of her [former] husbands was Native, so like one or some of her children were Native, and some of them weren't, and she said that her white daughter was always just…so sad that she doesn't have…all this extra history, and…cool cultural opportunities, as if everything about the culture is just like a perk, like you just get the perks…like literally we're in a training about generational trauma… Not everything is for us, right? (58:48–1:01:10).

This framing of identity as a "perk", rather than a practice hard fought over and honored in a contemporary setting through regalia, captures exactly the administrative overstep Kora was naming. Such moments of overstep, rooted in an unexamined white comfort that treats identity as

a possession, are exactly the kind of affective minefields the policy failed to anticipate, creating the very squeamishness and discomfort that would become a central barrier to implementation.

This complicated sentiment is also shared by white community members: the push for Indigenous presence is somehow a break away from a tranquil peace, the necessity to engage in Siletz culture, and the decentering of whiteness are not only unnecessary but the cause of contention. Kora spoke candidly about these pervasive opinions, stating,

> My [relative's] generation, I've spoken with, I've heard them talking about how, when they went to school here, nobody, you know, everybody got along, there was no, like, division, and etc., etc, coded for, we didn't have cultural programs here that taught, you know, or encouraged any kind of like thought about bringing culture and identity into school, so the default was white culture, because that's all you get in a vacuum of anything else, you get the default white culture, which is they just think about it as, as this is the world we live in… (1:05:57–1:06:42).

This is not a new phenomenon, Unfortunately, this is well-documented because the call for representation and presence is often framed as a form of divisiveness.

The squeamishness and discomfort that Kora discusses signal a significant barrier the Tribal History, Shared History policy failed to account for. How much effort would be necessary to prepare educators to work through that distress and to implement a curriculum that, by its very existence, contradicts and unsettles their own educational experiences. Because this is a new practice, many current teachers have never had teachers who modeled teaching against the grain of settler-colonial ideologies, ideologies prevalent in education through the centering of white experience and, by extension, the erasure or misrepresentation of BIPOC experiences. Consequently, an affective dynamic was left unplanned for and unaddressed by the policy.

This theme surfaces throughout the interviews: the knowledge that teacher anxiety about "getting it wrong" would limit (and is limiting) educators' desire to even engage with a curriculum that handles topics that many have not had to approach/experience as both educators

and students themselves. This limited background knowledge leads to concerns when working in a primarily white school where "getting it wrong" misrepresents a culture that is not present to correct those missteps. Kora, who taught in a school with many Indigenous students, had a related concern. She said she sometimes feels out of place teaching this material: "It feels so hypocritical and patronizing to teach tribal kids about tribal issues" (7:40), which speaks to this experience.

She did not regard this an insurmountable barrier, however. She reflected on overcoming this anxiety, and the humility necessary: "I've had a lot of humbling moments of working with tribal youth…one of my quiet kids corrected me on the pronunciation of a name" (7:55). She recalled that her initial response was one of defensiveness and attempted to carry on, but she sat with that moment and listened closer as one of the other students advocated for their peer and stated, "'No dude, he's telling you that's his uncle…and how to say his name right', and I was like 'oh my goodness, thank you so much, I had no idea'" (8:06-8:26). She followed up with the student after class and thanked them for advocating for their family, and that she was appreciative of them stepping out of their comfort zone to correct an adult.

Teacher Vulnerability as a Bridge

Kora often referred to this feeling of awkwardness as "ickiness". She considered the graciousness that followed not as something to be avoided by educators, but as something to maintain good rapport with students. For educators who might instead wish to remain in strained silence, that avoidance becomes an extension of their desire to preserve the way they feel an educator is supposed to be perceived: as the exclusive holder of knowledge. Instead, breaking these silences and being grateful for the possibilities that arise are responsibilities. She names her own whiteness as a key component of this responsibility; she specifically points to a unit that

references the book *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline (2017) a novel that depicts a dystopian future where the planet is ravaged by climate disasters and Indigenous people are hunted for their bones, which grant the ability to dream. This novel touches on several topics that may lead to contention. Kora is well aware of that tension and uses it as an opportunity to build students' repertoire of evidence-based arguments. In doing so, the students are given tools not only to deepen their understanding of climate change but also to apply that same process of analysis using evidence and inquiry to systems of settler colonialism and white supremacy.

> [W]e all [have] got to get on the same page, that science is real, and this is what science says. All gets backed up with every year when we're doing research units, how we make claims that are based on evidence…then you should feel secure in what you're saying, and so when I talk about white culture and white supremacy, I don't say anything that can't be backed up with some scholarship, but I do know that some people feel uncomfortable talking about it, like as a white teacher, if I don't call it out, who's going to? That's kind of my, that's my responsibility, I feel like, and I need the kids just to hear those words said out loud sometimes, and they're super smart" (20:22–21:14).

Thus, for Kora, the act of refusing silence - of saying out loud what scholarship supports and what white supremacy and settler colonialism would rather leave unspoken - becomes a personal responsibility and classroom practice, one that refuses to treat objectivity as a shield for inaction and instead treats it as a call to deeper, evidence-based challenges to that supremacy.

While the topic of discomfort is a recurring one, this exemplar offers what it means to engage with that discomfort specifically by using it as an opportunity to challenge the students to build defensible ideas, back up those ideas with evidence, potentially work through critical thinking practices, and engage conceptually with colonialism and white supremacy in a way that is not about guilt, but rather a lived reality that is defensible through evidentiary practice. These conversations become possible when educators sit with their discomfort and develop their

lessons with it in mind. Kora frames this practice of self-examination and argumentation as not only a possibility, but a responsibility.

Curricular Siloing as a Byproduct of White Fragility

Alongside this responsibility, Kora also identifies a propensity for curricular siloing. Born from discomfort with this complex and violent history, this phenomena leads to relegating Indigenous history to its own niche that is separate from Oregon history, which means many people never encounter this aspect of history because it is segregated from the more general narrative. This topic came up when discussing the book, *The People Are Dancing Again: The History of the Siletz Tribe of Western Oregon* by Charles F. Wilkinson (2012):

> [The] fact that it's not framed as Oregon history, as like this is the history of Lincoln County. It's not just the history of the select tribal people. If you want to know the history of this place, you have to read this book, and so many people don't, because they think of it just as Native studies…you live here? You should know what happened here. (40:07–41:28).

Though this exemplar is specific, this habituated relegation is pervasive and pernicious. The distancing of historic trauma, violence, and erasure of Indigenous lives, presence, history, and futures from the US/Oregon canon functions as an act of attempted moral absolution, an attempt to sterilize the perception of exceptionalism from the moral blot of genocide.

Kora's own practice exemplifies a refutation of curricular siloing she herself critiques; the above example of her use of Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* shows how Indigenous topics are not supplemental but rather can be informative and structurally significant when woven through other materials. She uses the unit on this novel to deepen the students' understanding of argumentation, climate change, and science. They trace the science behind climate projections, examine the historical parallels between the novel's marrow hunts and real colonial violence, and test how claims about race and power can be supported or dismantled by scholarship. This

models the collapse of the necessity to silo Indigenous studies. In a thorough practice, Indigenous literature, presence, and history are not a fragile addition, but a thread through other foundational materials.

Amelioration in Sitting in Discomfort

Ultimately the goal of SB 13 requires vulnerability. Engaging with silences, discomfort, and a willingness to move beyond that discomfort as well as a readiness to break down the perception of educators as exclusive knowledge keepers in the classroom flattens that hierarchy instead. Modern teacher preparation programs have been attempting to capture the significance of understanding that students come into classroom spaces with a wealth of knowledge that educators should explore, create meaningful engagement with, and be open to student correction when topics close to their communities are implemented in their classrooms. However, identity may play a larger role in hindering that comfort than these policies and current teacher preparation often address. White teachers seem to be very aware of how their identity is perceived when implementing the Indigenous-centered curriculum to a group of Indigenous students, and they are also aware of the necessity to combat the inclination to avoid insecurity in those moments.

During our conversation, Kora emphasized this point of needing to push past insecurity and "squeamishness" multiple times, but one moment in particular stands out. After noting that teacher education programs are moving to emphasize students' background knowledge, lived experience, and expertise, she identifies this understanding as a core part of her own teaching philosophy: not just to emphasize student identity, but to actively create space for it. She has begun prefacing identity-centered work with a personal statement to model vulnerability and invite students to do the same. She states, "I'm white, that's not a secret. I'm gonna do my best

here, and I'm gonna make mistakes, so please be patient with me. And I 100% want your feedback…I promise you, it's important to me to keep learning, and if you know something that can improve my instruction, please don't hesitate. That's important, and it makes me feel more comfortable once I get that out" (10:19-10:45). If that identity statement is Kora putting her philosophy into practice, then her next reflection reveals the pedagogical conviction underneath it: the belief that leaving awkwardness unspoken creates an "elephant in the room" that distracts from learning, and that teachers cannot ask students to be vulnerable without first modeling that vulnerability themselves.

> [S]ome teachers might feel like we're not supposed to talk about how we feel awkward, we're just supposed to do the curriculum, and then there's like this elephant in the room, and everybody knows it's there, and it makes everything more uncomfortable than it needs to be, and…it distracts from the learning…it's another layer of that fear of hypocrisy, because we want students to be vulnerable, we should model that. (10:54-11:20).

These moments of introspection are significant and profound, and unfortunately, these vital engagements are not as easily performed as Kora's words might suggest. Her context is special in that she has come to this realization organically, and she does so as an extension of the relationships she has fostered with her students, the school, and the larger community. This kind of understanding of community engagement and of students themselves is not as easily accomplished as a simple professional development course or a detached, outlier course that espouses the practice. It is embedded in educators who put themselves in relationship with the communities they serve. This form of community building requires more of teacher education programs: it necessitates that they adopt holistic approaches and discuss how curriculum operates at the community level. It is more than simple content knowledge, although this is an important component. It is understanding what it means to be part not just of the school, but of the people who surround and fill schools.

Perhaps this is one of the strongest misgivings we have: that we can supplement connection and engagement with performance and scripting. The reality is that building relationships between teachers and students takes time and is only bolstered when we also encourage it between teachers and the larger community. This requires a fundamental shift in how we conceptualize teacher education that runs counter to the active presense of settler colonialism.

Interdependence Over Isolation

Thus far, Kora's story sheds light on the current shortcomings of SB 13: administrative anxieties, school board dismissiveness, teachers' hesitancy to engage in the policy mandate due to feelings of 'squeamishness' or anxiety, and other ways the agentic assemblage of settler colonialism presents itself when the habituated silences and white supremacy hegemony defend themselves. Her recollection of her engagement with this assemblage leads to a significant question: what happens when teachers do not possess her level of connection, cultural humility, and willingness to sit with discomfort that come with difficult but necessary conversations in the classroom? While the above work is significant in that it names a few of the ways Kora experienced this complex and often imbricated system of settler colonialism, it does risk framing this work as requiring only exceptional people rather than individuals that reside within the complex ecosystems of community members and colleagues who serve as bridges, mentors, colleagues, and co-conspirators[7].

During our conversation, as hinted at above, Kora described her effort to embed herself in the Siletz community: she attends events, speaks with people, shops and lives locally, and

[7] Co-conspirator as someone who moves beyond mere allyship to actively use their privilege, take political risks, and share the burden in the fight for justice. (Love, 2019)

through these actions has developed trust with her students and their families. This is done in small ways, but it is a necessary component of working with communities and finding collaborators who make this kind of work possible. She states,

> [Y]ou shouldn't be working with populations of students whose culture you're not willing to do your best to absolutely learn…and recognize…There's a lot of hunters here…hunting is a big part of the culture…baseball is a big part of the culture, dude. I'm gonna go to a baseball game, even though…I didn't grow up going to baseball games, and I'm gonna do my best to, like, learn and care. And then, because you love your students, it [community connection] just takes off naturally. (19:02–19:36).

If we aspire to have early career teachers take a similar approach to their teaching – and I think we should – this will require teaching them to become a part of the communities in which they teach, examine the political history that place them in this community, and prepare themselves for the emotional dimensions of this work. Kora uses hunting and baseball as examples of openings into these communities that require more nuanced engagement than simply conceptualizing schools as separate from these rich and dynamic webs of connection.

Furthermore, becoming more involved with Indigenous communities develops interconnectedness and fosters goodwill, which will outweigh any suspicion that arises when attempting to break curricular hegemony and implement a curriculum that centers communities that have faced systemic erasure. Kora's case illustrates that this is so even when one is teaching in the communities that face erasure. This came in the form of a colleague she spoke highly of (and whose insights we will explore in the next case study): Samantha, a Siletz Tribal member and cultural educator with years of experience working in Indigenous communities and alongside primarily white educators to accomplish those goals. While Kora has a connection to the community because she married into a long-standing family in the Siletz area, she also recalls that she feels driven to bolster her knowledge of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, given her work in the community and with students who are also members of CTSI.

While it is one thing to tell yourself to wade into the awkwardness that this kind of curriculum invites (to be vulnerable), it is also helpful to have colleagues who are well adept at the work you are attempting to implement: encouraging you, sharing in that knowledge of impending awkwardness, and giving you permission to get things wrong and be corrected. That is what Samantha represented for Kora. When discussing the awkwardness, Kora introduced her by saying,

> I have a colleague, Samantha…who I'm able to talk to. She's like invited that [permission to be awkward]…we had a superintendent, very provocative, who wanted to talk about this [awkwardness/squeamishness], and…we all sat in a circle and made these generalizations of…I know we all feel uncomfortable doing this [SB 13]…she kind of spoke in this tone of …forgetting that she has native staff [afterwards], Samantha gave us this pep talk that was just like, 'look, it is going to be awkward, okay? Just get over it, get over yourself…learn from your mistakes. You have to try... you can't make this about you... do your best and then do better.' (11:20 - 15:05).

Again, while Kora understands this decentering educator discomfort implicitly, an emphasis on breaking these silences so future generations can understand that identities are dynamic is still needed. Indigenous people are not only stories of tragedy and victimry but also stories of presence, and students who are part of those communities deserve to see their identities represented in their vibrancy. Non-Indigenous students need to understand the way systems operate to erase that nuance and deepen their understanding of relationships with their peers, and this is what should be centered in this work, not simply educator discomfort. Colleagues like Samantha are often present; fostering openness with people with more experience and knoweldge of Indigenous student cultures will make building strong teaching relationships with students feel not only "doable" but mandatory and will, by extension, create classroom spaces where students want to spend their time. As students develop tools to challenge hegemonies and begin to understand identity as complex, they can represent that complexity to break down

classrooms where those identities were historically unrepresented. It is in those breaks where educators can create possibilities.

Pitfalls of Relying on Exemplary Colleagues and Cultural Insiders

Although finding and valuing colleagues like Samantha is extremely helpful, even this practice can be undermined by the insidious movement of settler colonialism in schools. Kora drew my attention to the propensity of institutions and individuals to lean on exemplary colleagues, particularly those from the community one is attempting to work alongside and from the communities the curriculum is attempting to center. There are well-documented practices of "offloading" responsibility and emotional labor onto colleagues of color when discomfort and unfamiliarity with the subject matter become prevalent. This becomes particularly noticeable when educators become "squeamish" around SB 13; they look toward a colleague like Samantha to solve issues and speak on behalf of entire communities.

Kora directly named this inclination and her own tendency to lean on Samantha until she realized how much of the work placed on her was not only uncompensated but also underappreciated. While aware of the emotional labor that is often foisted onto women, she also acknowledges that this is compounded for women of color:

> [E]motional labor that women tend to carry is just like double for women of color… [Samantha] was just like, I am, I want to help you with this, like, yes, please… well, she's not getting compensated for this, and then it's bothersome. They wanted her to do tribal liaison work uncompensated…" (1:18:50–1:20:10).

Kora's account makes visible how, without institutional safeguards, the discomfort generated by SB 13 is off-loaded onto the very colleagues whose communities the policy is meant to center and whose labor, as she insists, should be recognized and compensated rather than taken for granted.

While there are other Indigenous faculty and staff, the expectation placed on Samantha is exacerbated by her approachability and her clear, public desire to assist her peers in centering the identity of a community she is passionate about. Kora attempts to mitigate this inclination in her own practice and is grateful to have a resource like Samantha. But when colleagues center Samantha as the exclusive representative of a complex identity while refusing to acknowledge her unpaid labor (both emotional and time-related), Kora understands that allyship means stepping up and naming this propensity. Not to defend Samantha, but to name the entitlement to her labor and to use her own privilege when confronted with those oversteps:

> When I see things like that happening, I'm learning a lot because Samantha shouldn't have to be the one who always speaks up…I learn a lot with these experiences. (1:17:20–1:18:10)

This balancing is important because the work of breaking silences and centering Indigenous presence and identity is not a practice that can be done as a solo project of a singular well-intentioned educator. It is instead done within communities that educators themselves must be encouraged to seek out, not as an attempt to offload emotional labor, but out of a desire to form successful bulwarks and supports that make this kind of work possible.

This observation is not meant to encourage us to train educators to avoid engaging with peers who hold community and knowledge distinct from ours; rather, it is meant to prompt introspection about the purpose of that engagement. Is it to develop and bolster connections, gain knowledge and better our own practices of cultural engagement, or to instead unburden ourselves of the emotional and intellectual labor of seeking those answers? Or is it to obfuscate the need for examining our own affective relationships with policies meant to break silences, and understand that one of the costs of those broken silences is a feeling of unease which should be

examined in ourselves, not pushed onto colleagues who have been historically forced to exist within that silence?

Accountability and an Imagined Future

The dynamic between Kora and Samantha, and individual teachers and individual community members generally has a parallel at the institutional level. The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians and the Siletz Valley Schools administration had a turbulent relationship.The administration and faculty of the school state they wish for the tribe to be more involved, as do the education and cultural specialists who work for the tribe However, the desire of school faculty and educator/cultural specialists working for the tribe to be more involved is rarely acted upon. The resulting division is felt not only by the staff of each organization but also by families within the community. Because of the high administrative turnover within Siletz Valley Schools and the long institutional memory of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, a complex history of perceived slights has accumulated from individuals no longer affiliated with the school, and by extension, the school is seen as a settler institution. This is illustrated by the comment quoted from the board member earlier reiterating that "this is not a Native school." This perception unfortunately draws the school into a long-standing contention with the history of struggle between white and Native families in Siletz.

Kora's family history positions her to be uniquely aware of this dynamic and of the necessity to work through it to create a transformative space that bridges this divide. She brings this point to bear through direct introspection:

> "There's some historic beef between white families, and native families, and…I'm in a weird...like, I'm in a position where I've thought about this a lot because...I'm [in] a family who's been in Siletz for a very long time, and I wanted to find out, like, like, are they/were they homesteaders?...Where, who did you take the land from?" (1:03:25–1:05:57).

A palpable tension is felt and lived through the relationship dynamics between these two communities; however, each continues to share a desire to foster something more.

This division is not only experienced at the community level, where that division between the Native and white community members is perceptible, but those community dynamics are not independent of the interplay between the school and CTSI. Whether they be from former school administrators/board members decentering Indigenous students and wanting to reinforce the separation between the school and the Tribe, or family members with long-standing complicated histories. These partitions, while not a physical barrier, nonetheless keep these two entities separate.

Kora gave examples of how tangible these dynamics are during the recent meeting between Lincoln County School District, Siletz Valley Early College Academy, and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians to determine whether or not the school should continue to exist in light of recent events. She said, "At the Lincoln County School District board meeting, where they were voting on closing us or keeping us open…There's the bleachers with staff and students, and then across on the other side, there's our admin, because they're not sitting with us, and then there's the educational specialists from the tribe. They…never came over to our area and interacted…it definitely felt like such a strained relationship, and…maybe they did think that it was in their best interest for us to not stay open in this iteration that we're in…" (1:32:26 - 1:34:56). While not explicitly stated, the feeling of division was experienced, while no outward animosity was expressed, Kora noted that the Confederation's representatives may not be in favor of the continued existence of the Acadamy.

These divisions, sustained by all parties involved, may be lessening because of work by teachers who reach out to community members and show both their compassion and desire to

represent the complex history of the community in which they are embedded. Kora is a notable example of this practice. Her account of her work suggests that, although teacher education courses and professonal development are necessary and helpful to developing this practice, it is not sufficient to enable the kind of practice teaching content like that mandated by SB 13. Genuinely transformative teaching that navigates the complicated, shifting identity and affective terrain of decolonial curricula requires more. It emerges from, is refined by, and is sustained by, engagement at the community level. It is through these engagements that educators learn to inhabit their identities in their full complexity, and can be reminded of the value of acknowledging mistakes when they occur.

While there is not a fast solution to this in teacher preparation, it does start with understanding the fluidity that comes with community dynamics that are always already in motion when teachers arrive. Working with preservice educators to help them understand the shifting nature of curriculum and community is a significant step in preparing them for the realities of challenging long-sedimented practices that continue to center settler-colonial ideologies.

With this slow process comes imagining and contemplating what a fruitful and effective relationship between the Confederated Tribe of Siletz Indians and Siletz Valley Schools would look like if resources were shared and effective collaborative opportunities were not only explored but valued and sought after. Kora reflected on her vision of an ideal relationship, one that would be thorough and regularly tended to—a dynamic that would fundamentally shift this long-standing isolation due to a contentious history:

> It would be a stronger relationship with the educational specialist at the tribe…maybe like a curriculum team that meets regularly…a representative teacher from the elementary, middle school, and high school, with educational specialists from the tribe and our cultural department, where we…strategize for

> the whole school…There would also be administrative oversight, and there would be some…accountability mechanism that is not enough for admin to check off…'we said the word tribal history shared history at a staff meeting once, so we're doing it now.'…Who's doing it, when are they doing it, and what are they doing, and then that would also roll into anytime we get a new staff…we need to have like an onboarding process…It needs to be holistic, and it needs to come from the top down. (1:35:35–1:40:33)

Conclusion

The case study of Kora, situated within the broader context of SB 13 implementation, supports the thesis that meaningful curricular transformation cannot be accomplished simply through legislative mandates, professional development sessions, or even well-intentioned individual effort. What emerges from this analysis is a more complicated understanding of curricular change, one that sees curricula as more than a discreet set of concepts to be transmitted or a simple set of lesson materials to be adopted. Instead, curriculum operates as a living, contested terrain where histories of dispossession, affective processes of discomfort and avoidance, and the sedimented practices of settler colonialism converge to shape educational spaces.

Kora's experiences illuminate how curriculum is never simply about course content and content knowledge: it is always already entangled with the emotional landscapes of those who teach it, the institutional histories that precede and surround it, and the community dynamics that give it meaning or render it superficial. The forty-minute lesson that feels "more performative than anything" is not simply a failure to plan or anticipate but a symptom of a system designed to absorb and neutralize challenges to its own coherence. When curriculum runs counter to settler-colonial ideologies and futurities, it encounters resistance not only through explicit pushback but through the quieter, more pervasive forces of institutional pushback, administrative avoidance,

and the individual anxieties of educators who have never been given permission or tools to do otherwise.

What becomes particularly significant is the recognition that these impediments are not merely human failures requiring better training or more resources, though those matter. Rather, they are expressions of what might be called more-than-human agential forces: the accumulated weight of historical silences that shape what can be spoken; the institutional systems and processes that channel attention and resources toward some outcomes and away from others; the affective relationships that make discomfort a barrier rather than an invitation for growth; and the long-standing community divisions that operate as a kind of invisible barrier. These forces are not easily overcome by policy or professional development because they are not located in any single actor or institution; they are distributed across the entire ecosystem of schooling, operating through the environment of hallways and classrooms, through the habits and expectations of what school is, and through the assumptions embedded in curriculum frameworks.

For preservice teacher education, the implications are profound and dynamic. If curriculum is understood as a complex assemblage of human and more-than-human forces, then teacher preparation cannot be limited to content knowledge or pedagogical strategies, however culturally responsive they might claim to be. It must instead cultivate in new educators a capacity for understanding how complex and imbricated these relationships are. It requires giving educators an understanding of fluidity, adaptability, and necessary camaraderie to recognize the sedimented histories that shape present dynamics, sense when silence is operating as a form of erasure, and understand that meaningful engagement with Indigenous-centered curriculum requires not just knowledge and materials, but relationship and the willingness to sit in discomfort and be corrected from all sources, student, colleague, and community members alike.

Kora's practice offers a model of this engagement, though her account also cautions against romanticizing individual effort as the sole arbiter of transformative practice. Her success is not merely a function of her personal qualities but emerges from her embeddedness in a community, her willingness to seek out colleagues like Samantha who can offer guidance, and her recognition that this work cannot be done in isolation. Yet her story also reveals how easily this labor can be offloaded onto those who are already marginalized, how institutional structures can absorb individual effort without changing themselves, and how even the most committed educators can find themselves swimming against currents they cannot fully see.

The tension between hope and structural constraint that runs through Kora's narrative suggests that while policies like SB 13 represent an important recognition of past failures and future possibilities, they cannot, by themselves, transform the conditions that produced those shortcomings. The curriculum that emerges from such policy is always in danger of being domesticated, becoming additive rather than transformative, and being checked off rather than lived. Transformation requires not just new materials but new ways of being in relationship with curriculum, community, and the histories that continue to shape both.

What this case study ultimately points to is the necessity of conceiving curriculum not as a product to be delivered but as a practice of engagement: one that acknowledges the agency of history, place, community memory, and the affective responses that arise when settled narratives are disrupted. This is a curriculum that is protean because it is always shifting in response to the forces that converge upon it. It is never fully controllable but always responsive to those who engage with it and understand that this shifting nature must be met with a counter practice that is just as protean and able to shift. It is a curriculum that requires not just knowledge but

vulnerability, not just policy but relationship, not just good intentions but the willingness to be changed by the encounter.

In this sense, the work of challenging settler-colonial hegemony through curriculum is never finished, never fully successful, never beyond the reach of co-optation or domestication. But it is also never without possibility. The hopefulness that Kora and her colleagues express, even in the face of structural challenges, speaks to something essential: that the acts of refusing comfortable silences, wading into the awkward "ickiness," and working through the squeamishness generate their own momentum, create their own possibilities, and open futurities that cannot be fully anticipated or contained. It is this generative tension between constraint and possibility, between what is and what might be, that must be at the core of curriculum studies and teacher education if we are to prepare educators not just to implement policy but to participate in the ongoing work of building more just educational futurities.

Chapter 5: Samantha

Indigenous Educators, Indigenous Topics, Transformative Curriculum?

Storytelling In Motion and Practice:

Samantha, a Citizen of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz as well as the Tribal Language and Culture teacher for the entirety of Siletz Valley Schools[8] (K-12), is a well-regarded orator and storyteller; thus, she often does not answer questions the way institutions, colleagues, and students expect. Ask her about curriculum regarding SB 13, and she does not respond with a sound bite, something small and neat that captures what she believes you would like to hear in a tidy statement. Instead, she hands out stories, often one that circles around to the question; it gathers momentum as she tells it, and lands somewhere deeper than a direct answer ever could. This is not out of evasiveness; it is an epistemological stance that holds more meaning lives in narratives than in bullet points, and that often the hardest-to-hear discussions around identity, education and policy are better articulated through storied accounts of lived experiences, than through abstraction.

That storytelling approach is one of the many things that positions Samantha so well to discuss the rollout of Senate Bill 13. She sits at an interesting intersection, where many factors converge to make her experiences and insight invaluable in discussions about SB 13; she is an Indigenous language educator and cultural practitioner, one of the few Indigenous staff at Siletz Valley Schools, and she completed her teaching certification as the policy took shape. From that positionality, she saw not only the bill's stated goals and hopeful framing, but also the slippage

[8] Samantha's role operates as a language instructor; which offers 2nd language course credits for students, as well as a cultural educator. Her educational background is a double major BS in psychology and Child and Family Studies, certificate in Native American Studies, and an M.Ed in Elementary Education and Teaching with a focus on American Indian Urban Education.

between what was promised and what the unexpected pushback looked like in classrooms. When she describes that slippage, she does so in a familiar way: through stories.

One of those stories pertained to a feather, a simple generic representation of Indigeneity placed as a decorative marker on a curriculum pamphlet meant to represent the Siletz people. That feather, as small as it was, represented a much larger problem that would haunt the implementation of SB 13: the pull of pan-indigeneity, the institutional comfort with symbols over substance, the profound difficulty of developing a curriculum that goes against the grain of settler colonial futurities, and the long sedimented practice that makes enacting a curriculum that centers Indigenous presence seem insurmountable. A curriculum intended to be transformative in its specificity of representation of identity gave way to performative symbols, comfortable silence, and expected representation.

This retreat into comfortable symbolism functions similarly to another form of erasure that Samantha mentioned, the persistent belief that Native people exist only in the past. Siletz Valley Schools operates in close proximity to the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians (CTSI). A large portion of its students are citizens of CTSI[9]. Even within this context, the idea of Native people existing exclusively in the past remains a deeply entrenched perception. This belief has a profound impact on the implementation of curricula about Indigenous peoples and culture, as this work is not just about truth-telling about the past. It also seeks instill an understanding of contemporary Indigenous identity. The perception that Indigenous people only existed in the past functions like a fog that is not burned away by the mere presence of a curriculum that includes representations of Indigenous peoples. This misrepresentation is resilient, as though that fog is struggling against its own dissipation.

[9] 65% according to a recent report. Bartoo-Smith, N. (Bartoo-Smith, N, 2026, April 10).

The idea that Native people are historical artifacts, as opposed to contemporary neighbors, is so deeply ingrained that even young children who have Native classmates, teachers, and community members, and who are surrounded by Indigenous events, still think of Indigenous peoples as existing in the distant past. Samantha shares a conversation with a young student:

> This little kid goes, I wish I could go back in time and, like, meet a Native American… and I said, you don't have to go back in time, like, I'm right here… 'No, no, I mean, like, back in time, and see a native'… I said, but I'm right here… I'm a Native American… you don't have to go back in time… I think that already in third grade they've got Native Americans in a historical sense… (47:44–48:46)

What is striking is not simply the child's misperception, their inability to recognize Samantha as a real Native person who exists in the here and now, but that even in the face of that living reality this misperception positions the ongoing presence of Indigenous people as unimaginable.

This sense of Indigenous people as exclusively historical figures is pervasive, and serves a purpose. When the more violent features of settler-Indigenous relations (erasure, genocide, ethnocide) are acknowledged, the act of historicization can set them at a distance, as though they exist outside contemporary experience, held at arm's length. This is a move toward innocence that must be contended with: it appears when termination[10] is framed as though it occurred beyond living memory, when tools and resources used by Native people are called "artifacts," and in other language that evokes historical distancing.

[10] The Western Oregon Indian Termination Act of 1954 (Public Law 83-588) emerged from the federal government's mid-twentieth-century "termination policy," which sought to end the United States' trust relationship with recognized tribes, dissolve reservations, and assimilate Native peoples into state jurisdiction. In western Oregon, the act terminated federal recognition and services for numerous tribes and bands (including the Confederated Tribes of Siletz and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde) resulting in the loss of tribal sovereignty, land bases, and federal support. Many affected groups were later restored to federal recognition through subsequent congressional acts, but termination remains a key example of the settler-colonial erasure and assimilationist aims underlying federal Indian policy

Samantha challenges this erasure in her teaching, primarily through stories and making these histories personal to students,

> I use my mom as an example, when my mom was born, she was… in the tribe for two years, and then we were terminated… it doesn't mean that you're not native, it just means that the government doesn't recognize you… Kids will go home, and they'll talk to their parents and grandparents, and they'll come back with stories… (28:01-29:08)

Samantha embodies the living memory of the termination of Oregon's tribes for her students. These grounded examples create connection points for students between school and their personal lives:

> …kids will go home, and they'll talk to their, their parents and grandparents, and they'll, they'll come back with stories, you know. So, we, you know, it's not just me sharing stories; the kids will share stories too. (28:54-29:08)

This community connection offers a challenge to the erasure of Indigenous presence; it helps not only Native students feel seen but also non-Native students understand just how present this history is.

Once this engagement with "living memory" reveals how contemporary the history of termination is, it opens up classroom space to discuss more contemporary issues facing Indigenous communities. Students begin discussing their experiences struggling with aspects of their identity; Samantha's modeling of this vulnerability creates that space for her students, and her own struggles offer the students room to do the same. One particular issue that comes up is blood quantum, a topic rife with potential pitfalls:

> …they'll pull [tribal IDs] out and they'll compare it to their friends… show them what blood quantum math looks like… and how it's… a way of erasing us again… and how you, you know, we as a tribe can prevent that… some kids… 'I'm native, but I'm not enrolled, and I'm not able to be enrolled'… 'well, why is that?'… 'let's look at some math and see… is this fair?'… 'I don't think my kids can be enrolled,' and it's like, well, what can you do to change that? (28:01-30:23)

This kind of critical thinking practice, which challenges students to confront normalized settler colonial ideologies, is one of the strongest ways to challenge the consignment of Indigenous peoples to a distant history. Students see the reverberations of ethnocidal practices still in motion in their own lives and in the lives of their peers; though these reverberations operate differently for each student, they are all influenced by them.

These conversations are not only focused on the representation of the mere fact of contemporary Indigenous presence. They also focus on contemporary cultural practices in which students participate. Samantha told stories about the students' ongoing work with Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and celebrated how effectively the Siletz community has held onto some cultural practices—so much so that a portion of the students now conceptualize it as a natural part of their school lives. Samantha described typical conversations about the TEK curricula:

> What do you kids know about traditional ecological knowledge… 'I don't even know what that is'… and I'm like, but you live it… we have a little patch of hazel… when do we gather it… what do we do with them… did you guys look that up in a book… 'No'… 'Well, how do you know what to do?'… 'Because you showed us'… I said… that's traditional ecological knowledge, that's something that you don't learn in a book… you're learning science…We have new kids, the other kids will teach them how, and it's just…a cultural gathering, like this is the time to peel hazel… they know it, and it's traditional ecological knowledge, it's science; it's, you know, it's history, it's culture, it's all of those things… (11:16-15:45)

Students are given the opportunity to understand the complexity of identity through difficult discussions around blood quantum, cultural erasure, and the struggles to frame Indigenous presence in the face of historization and misrepresentation, and they also come to understand Indigenous identity as a living, fluid aspect of their lives, something they engage in unknowingly, yet which embodies a practice that has been held onto and is not simply surviving but thriving, not unlike the Siletz people themselves.

Additive, but Transformative?

The Oregon Department of Education's initial plan with the rollout of Senate Bill 13 (Tribal History/Shared History) was simple: ODE would provide significant funds to the nine Federally Recognized Tribes of Oregon[11], and allow those tribes the freedom to create curriculum as they saw fit. At first impression, this seems like a fitting approach. It respects the tribes' sovereignty and suggests a confidence that these communities would have the best tools on hand to create an appropriate and high-quality curriculum. Unfortunately, such resources were not readily available. Instead, many of the tribes struggled with putting systems of development in place. With a relatively short turnaround for the curriculum, tribes took different approaches to completing a K-12 curriculum centered on Indigenous identity; some created departments and hired cultural practitioners and educators in the hope that they could "hit the ground running" and begin creating a unique curriculum from scratch. Other tribes reached out to established curriculum development organizations and subcontracted to them to create curriculum, while others reached out to local Universities, believing they would have the resources and knowledge to create effective curriculum. The result was a slow rollout of SB 13 curriculum. The units produced were of uneven depth and quality.

Samantha had been aware of SB 13 since before its passage. She was aware of its stated goal of increasing the visibility of Indigenous communities throughout the state of Oregon. She was hopeful that it could become a significant step in the right direction, but also aware of how

[11] Burns Paiute Tribes, Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon, The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Resrvation, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Coquille Indian Tribe, Cow Creek Band of Umqua Tribe of Indians, and the Klamath Tribes.

these kinds of movements can be performative and rendered ineffective. With ODE reaching out to the nine Tribes of Oregon, however, she maintained a level of hopefulness. During this period, Samantha explained an instance in which she was approached by one of her professors to assist with some curriculum they were working on for the rollout:

> [During] grad school[12], my advisor reached out to me to help out with creating curriculum for the Siletz tribe for Senate Bill 13, because it was my understanding that ODE was going to come out with their curriculum, and then each of the tribes, the nine tribes, would come out with curriculum for it as well, and so I remember working with her…she wanted to do these little pamphlets, and when we were reviewing the pamphlet, I remember saying, you know, I want to make sure that we include Siletz basket patterns, and you know, things from the Siletz Tribe, because…I don't want there to be some generic, you know, native symbol for…Indigenous curriculum. I said, like a feather, and then when we opened it up, each of the page numbers, there was a feather on it…this is exactly what I'm talking about…don't use a feather, you know, unless it's a Flicker Feather, which is...pretty specific to our region, but I really wanted there to be basket patterns incorporated, and so I remember needing to get those materials for them, so that they could implement it into…the packets, the pamphlets that they were making. But then I didn't, because I was in grad school. (1:38-3:28)

This early brush with curriculum development, where the gap between her vision for culturally grounded material and the generic product that emerged was so stark, colored her expectations for the state-level rollout of Senate Bill 13. When Oregon's official tribal curriculum finally began to appear, she approached it not just as a classroom teacher new to the topic but as someone who had already wrestled firsthand with what it meant for Indigenous curriculum to feel genuine rather than merely superficial.

> I didn't get to create a lot of that curriculum, I was just kind of an advisor, but it really was not good, it was word searches and crossword puzzles, and I just thought this isn't what I envisioned for a native curriculum…like you can't just put a feather on it and call it native curriculum. It's still a curriculum that you see, it's not, it's not innovative at all. It's like taking a children's book and making the kids brown and calling it a DEI book… it just didn't feel very genuine… [S]o when SB 13 came out with the state, I remember being so excited, but then also kind of disappointed on how slow the lessons were coming out…I remember reading

[12] During her time gaining her teaching licensure to become an educator.

> through them, and they just really felt very dry, very academic, and I couldn't picture teaching it…the way it was written. (3:28-5:04)

This frustration points to a larger issue with outsourcing Indigenous curriculum to external institutions: the experiences and knowledge held within those institutions (curriculum development organizations and higher education institutions) are rarely able to create complex, identity-based curricular materials that are based on cultural knowledge not currently present within those institutions. If a curriculum is to be transformative and break longstanding silences, it will take knowledge and imagination rarely found within systems that have historically defended those silences. The need for cultural specificity and nuance, for example, can be overlooked by these exogenous institutions. The goals of universities and curriculum-development organizations are frequently generalizability and scalability, aims that run antithetical to the demands of tailoring curricula to better represent specific Indigenous communities.

The impulse to foreground a generic pan-Indigeneity instead of honoring specific cultures is just one of many distributed examples of how settler colonial discourses continue to shape the curricula available to Indigenous communities in K-12 spaces. Generic pan-Indigenous approaches to representing Indigenous history and contemporary lives primarily serves the purpose of checking a box for state officials. It does little to satisfy a need to represent a living Indigenous identity and presence in the community. Pan-Indigeneity operates as a comfortable norm. Cultural icons easily recognizable as "Native" demand less unpacking than contemporary, place-specific identity. By relying on such significations, the curriculum can superficially satisfy the SB 13 mandate to represent Indigenous peoples without ever meaningfully unpacking a history of conflict or exploring Indigenous presence that refuses assimilation.

This is the fundamental shortcoming of the SB13 implementation so far. Rather than conceptualizing SB 13 as a movement to prepare preservice and current educators to engage the whole dynamic of cultural erasure and survivance, the curriculum defaults to a kind of simplistic inclusion of banal generalizations about Indigenous people. This cooptation of SB13 ends up reinforcing and normalizing a settler colonial desire to avoid talking about the specific ongoing impacts of colonization in local communities. We are left with a representation that makes the idea of Native people visible while rendering the reality of Native people invisible, feeding back into the trope that Indigeneity doesn't exist unless it is wrapped in buckskin and feathers.

Policy Mandate as in Mandatory

Another largely unforeseen shortcoming is the struggle to emphasize the significance of implementing SB 13 throughout all course areas, and that it is not an optional engagement but a mandatory one. As mentioned in the case study about Kora's teaching, many white educators expressed discomfort when engaging with curriculum that centered Indigenous identity. Both Kora and Samantha felt this discomfort was part of what caused a significant number of educators to avoid a more ambitious implementation of the SB13 curricular mandate. If education looks the way it always has, avoiding the discussion of topics that may take students and teachers outside their comfort zones, then peace can be maintained within those habituated silences.

Perhaps one of the most insidious aspects of this pervasive silence is that the curricular mandates were rendered ineffectual not through dramatic action, but through people in positions of authority (educators, administrators, board members, and even communities) treating this work as though it is optional. While the mandate is, well, mandatory, the silences about

Indigenous presence are so habituated that failing to draw attention to them, failing to name the silence as an active self-reinforcing phenomena, enables educational systems to quietly revert to a pattern of erasing Indigenous presence.

Samantha draws attention to the way various forms of discomfort with discussing Indigenous distinctiveness become the mechanism through which teachers are enlisted in avoiding substantive engagement with the material. She specifically names the discomfort and then goes a step further and encourages teachers to work through the discomfort. Samantha recounts a story in which a colleague told her,

> I'm not native, so you know, I just don't know if I can… if I can do it," and Samantha responded: "Well, you teach about Shakespeare… are you, are you a white male… from that era?…" The colleague replied, "Well, no, but I've been taught, you know, Shakespeare's poems," and Samantha continued, "Well, just treat this as if you're teaching poetry, and this author happens to be native… follow the lesson plan… you can, you just have to do it once, and then you'll get more comfortable. (19:23 - 21:03)

This story points to a kind of relational work that Samantha does during these collegial exchanges; she is not simply sharing ideas or strategies, she is instead sharing a resolve. That work is significant and necessary for the community she and her coworkers exist within.

Samantha's intervention is straightforward. She draws attention to the ongoing pattern of avoidance, points out the difference in the way teachers treat other content, and encourages teachers to treat the Indigenous studies content similarly. The hope is that through engagement and repetition they will develop comfort with the content and normalize teaching the material. Reframing the issue as something teachers can work through, Samantha suggests, will make them a more effective educator. Arguably, sitting in discomfort is a skill set all teachers should model, not something we should avoid or hide in habituated silences. In her conversation with

her colleague, Samantha provided not only permission to break the silences about Indigenous distinctiveness in all its specificity, she provided a form of affective support for doing this work.

SB 13 itself was arguably intended as a form of social support for teaching Indigenous studies content in k-12 schools. It provides teachers cover for teaching such material. And it provides administrators with a reason to encourage teachers to teach such curricula, if they do not seek to do so on their own. The problematic framing of an Indigenous-centered curriculum as optional (moral to adopt, but understandable if educators choose not to wade into those waters) is contradicted by the very language of Senate Bill 13. However, as has been illustrated, the mere passage of the Bill is not enough on its own to create curricular change. The limited professional development opportunities that accompanied the passage of the Bill were also insufficient to prepare teachers to carry out the complicated work of implementation.

The SB13 curriculum mandate should be a feature of all ongoing professional development. Additionally education about it should be provided to preservice educators planning to work in Oregon and even more so if they will be teaching in schools with a known Indigenous population. Ignorance of SB 13's existence is a real problem, but a deeper issue is that even those who know about it treat it as optional. Samantha directly names this misframing:

> I don't think they recognize, like, it's a law, like, you, you have to teach it… I really hope that you know, instead of trying to grant permission, like enforce it… like, go ahead and do it. Enforce it. (21:29–22:29)

Her plea for urgency, for moving beyond merely passing a bill and then resting as though the work is done, reveals how, without enforcement, mandates meant to be transformative are rendered impotent.

The failure to anticipate the persistence of the silence about Indigenous history and contemporary lives, is illustrative of how the institutional and discursive assemblages of settler

colonialism are resistant to change at multiple levels. The negative affective precipitated by the SB 13 curriculum materials motivates people to frame them as optional; then, a lack of community awareness about the Bill makes it difficult to recognize and interrupt those silences. The result is a centering of settler discomfort rather than the transformative potential of curricula that center Indigenous presence. Inexorably, something with the potency of a policy mandate that has the support of ODE, the nine Federally Recognized Tribes of Oregon, and countless scholars, is rendered ineffectual.

This dampening of the force of the SB 13 policy is not just a function of a lot of personal failing by non-Indigenous teachers. Thinking of it that way underestimates the challenge such curricular mandates face. In fact, it underestimates the scope of the phenomenon we call "curriculum." The avoidance is also the consequence of the patchy implementation of the policy. It is a consequence of the dearth and low quality of the professional development made available to support SB 13 policy left teachers underprepared to enact the policy vision. The uneven quality and limited scope of SB 13 curriculum material that were developed similarly made the curricula feel like a piecemeal add-on to existing curricula, to be included when teachers had room for a stand along lesson or two. Both of these communicated that the state did not really see the transformative impact SB 13 as a priority.

Rather than asking how professional development might reduce that individual discomfort, a more robust curricular analysis would ask how the mandate's own design centers it, ensuring the transformative potential of SB 13 is undermined before it ever reaches the classroom. Samantha's comparison of SB 13 curricula to math and ELA requirements underscores this: teachers do not treat those subjects as optional because the curriculum (backed by assessment, accountability structures, institutional hegemony, extensive curriculum materials,

and robust and repeated professional development) does not permit it. Her question, "why do you think that it's optional?", can be turned back on the curriculum itself. The SB 13 curriculum, as it currently operates, has trained educators to read it as non-essential, a subject whose mandatory status is undercut by the very system that delivers it. Samantha followed up:

> I think that that's true with, with SB 13, is, is teachers think that it's optional, and why, why do you think that it's optional, and how can we reframe that… you don't do that with math curriculum, you know, you don't do that with ELA, you don't do that with science." (52:00 - 54:06)

What her observation reveals is not a failure of individual teachers but a curricular implementation that enables avoidance; in this way settler colonialism renders its own mandates ineffectual while making individual educators bear the blame.

Sources of Discomfort:

If understanding the way a curriculum policy design can tacitly permit the avoidance of difficult content is important, it is equally important to recognize that the discomfort we ask educators to endure into is not theirs alone. It is distributed across students, families, colleagues, and institutional expectations shaping the conditions for engagement in ways we rarely acknowledge. Changing practice often causes discomfort. Curriculum developers and teacher education programs need to, and often do, encourage educators to wade into that discomfort. This, however, is often attempted through moral arguments and tautologies: "you break silences because silences need to be broken," "students should see themselves because students deserve to be seen," etc. While factual and nearly impossible to argue against, these pithy admonitions to teachers encouraging them to individually will the curriculum into existence fails to capture how discomfort often shows up and circulates. When we advise preservice educators to work through

their fear and feelings of vulnerability, we fail to address the way these negative feelings often are the consequence of encounters with others' discomfort.

One source of this distributed affect is students, a dynamic well documented in the field of education. I have written about how educators avoid discomfort with their students and refuse to sit with the uneasiness that arises when silences are broken, or habitual avoidance is challenged, avoidance that can obscure the goals of education and allow our perception of student affect to limit students' development of the skills needed to meaningfully challenge settler-colonial hegemony (Hatch, 2024). This propensity for avoidance has also been extensively referenced in the work of Boni Wozolek (2020), who argues that the affective weight of students' lived traumas, left unattended, can foreclose the transformative potential of social justice curricula, creating conditions in which both teachers and students retreat to safer, less disruptive practices. Student affect also appears in Racism of the Enacted Curriculum: Agentic Ideas and the Spaces Between (Pratt, 2025), where Pratt illustrates that the routine, affectively charged reactions of students function as a mechanism that reproduces the very inequities a transformative curriculum aims to undo. As Pratt and Rosiek (2021) put it, "Teaching practice … is not just an emanation of learned techniques, but is also an expression of affective and cognitive relations to topics, children and teaching relations that are embedded in the stories they live" (p. 2).

The idea that students experience affect disequilibrium when learning controversial (or even just new) topics is not a novel concept; teachers contend with student affect and pushback against transformative curriculum every day. Confronting the realities of racism, settler colonialism, and heteronormativity (and recognizing how pervasive they are) is both a cognitive

and affective process, one that we should help educators learn to engage with, not retreat from at the first expression of frustration, dismissiveness, sarcasm, or sardonic remarks.

Samantha has experiences of this sort, moments in which she endured student pushback when she attempted to make the identity of her students and their peers visible in a place they rarely see that identity represented. Samantha's role as an Indigenous educator whose sole engagement with students is as an Indigenous person or cultural practitioner can feel tokenistic. When students close their eyes and envision what school is supposed to look like, it's difficult to imagine that many would name a role like the one Samantha fulfills: an Indigenous language and cultural educator for an entire K-12 school. They would name topics to be covered and the educators who need to cover them: social studies, science, mathematics, P.E., etc., but how many would list Traditional Ecological Knowledge? Native Culture? Native Language? In a school like Siletz Valley, these courses represent a significant shift. They show that Indigenous identity deserves space in K-12 education and that these are topics deserving attention and respect. Unfortunately, the departure from the norm that this represents often draws critique from the students.

These critiques can show up in different forms, but they have a coherence to them: they attempt to render the role of an Indigenous educator as nonessential. Samantha recalled a few episodes in which students acted in ways that sought to push Indigeneity to the periphery and explained how she responded to those moments:

> I've gotten pushback from students; there's one student who was like, well, 'why are you teaching tribal language? You're not fluent,' like nobody really is, you know. But we're doing what we can, you know, and hopefully it'll spark a child to want to become fluent…there are students who will, who will really gravitate towards the language, and do their self-study, and join those community classes…[am I] going to revive the language by myself? No, but I'm going to try, and you know, give that spark…I'm not here to teach you everything that you need to know about native history, you know, and I think that that's true for any

> history teacher, any English teacher. Like, I'm not here to give you the full library of everything; I'm just here to create that spark for you, so that you go down that path on your own. Find that path…another kid said that all you talk about is native stuff. I'm like, yep, and your math teacher, all they talk about is math, you know. Are you complaining to them?… Why do you think it's okay to say that to me." (33:03–35:29)

Samantha does not simply fall back on the moral tautology that students deserve to learn this; she turns these moments of pushback into an opportunity for learning. By asking "Why do you think it's okay to say that to me?" she exposes a curricular double standard moving in the room, the unspoken norm that Native content is optional.

A second source of the distributed affect of discomfort that meets curriculum focused on social change, one well documented within the field of educational studies, is parental pushback against critiques of settler hegemony. Although Samantha did not share such experiences during our conversation, we see this pushback in attempts to unsettle colonial comfort with narratives of American exceptionalism in popular media, as well as in ongoing critiques of Critical Race Theory[13]; one need only pay brief attention to depictions of CRT on right-wing propaganda outlets like FOX News and the OAN network to see how commonplace such reactions are. Many scholars have provided nuanced analysis of the settler colonial ideologies that inspire and shape these objections, as well as accounts of various strategies of resistance to the silences these ideologies enforce. Parents often express feeling of alientation from their children when they come home talking about an interpretation of Oregon or U.S. history with which they are not familiar. They can become frustrated that a more inclusive curriculum does not permit a normalization of settler violence and Indigenous displacement. They experience a sense of loss

[13] To be clear most of the objections have nothing to do with the actual critical race theory scholarship. The use of that term is more just a convenient placeholder for curricula that addresses the reality of institutionalized racial oppression in the U.Soften comessilences.

of a familiar story of the past and present where silence about Indigenous perspectives represented cohesion rather than silencing. I have personal experiences with parental pushback in which I was accused of pushing a "gay agenda" for a curriculum that centered Two-Spirit identities[14]. I have written about this in the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* (Hatch & Rosiek, 2024),

A third source of the distributed affect of discomfort with SB 13 aligned curriculum was other teachers. Samantha's more Indigenous centered curricula was often the focus of suspicion and even complaint from her colleagues. During her lessons, she has students work with traditional plants, such as hazel and cedar, and occasionally, when working with younger students (K-5), she has them participate in Native games. During these games, culturally grounded pedagogy can be misunderstood as lacking structure, even though the structure and purpose are explained to the students beforehand. But hesitant and skeptical colleagues, those with a relatively narrow view of what education is supposed to be, see this unique engagement as frivolous and unnecessary. She describes a traditional game played with her younger class:

> We're outside and we're playing, you know, a traditional game called run and scream, but from an outsider, you know, who doesn't know the lesson that goes with it, they're like, yeah, the kids don't do anything when they're in Samantha's class, they're just running around and you know, outside screaming … I just really wish that there was more structure in there. (31:55–32:41)

[14] Indigenous gender identity has been more complex that the familiar western gender binary since pre-contact. It is relatively recently that this difference has been given a name by Indigenous activists. At the 1990 Native American Gay and Lesbian conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada Fisher River Cree Elder Myra Laramie introduced the term Two-Spirit. Since its introduction, (Wilson, 2010) Two-Spirit has become an identity category that many Indigenous LGBTQIA2S+ people have begun to identify with as a way to signal and identify simultaneously with both their Indigeneity and their queerness (Wesley, 2015). Indigenous articulations of gender are complex and multilayered. They cannot be reduced to most contemporary whitestream conceptions of genderIndigenous-centered and sexual diversity that may have a surface overlap (Wilson, 2010) . Hundreds of Indigenous identities are coming together across geopolitical regions to develop and negotiate Two Spirit identities the definition and understanding of this term must remain fluid.

Ideally, this critique would lead to curiosity; coworkers would approach Samantha, ask about the purpose, and express a desire to learn about the background and cultural practices at work. That collegiality would likely be rewarded with an opportunity to collaborate and deepen an understanding of cultural engagement that transforms what education could look like. Instead, the suspicion persists, a pull to return to the comfortable norm of keeping Indigenous practice at the periphery of schools, even those with a significant number of Native youth.

Perhaps more tellingly, these seemingly private grievances did not stay private; they surfaced in professional spaces where unique cultural teachings and practices could face silencing. Teachers' discomfort with engaging in Indigenous-centered teaching did not only focus on what they felt unprepared to do, but in some cases also extended to suspicion that those who do engage in it as being somehow unprofessional or off task.

Samantha recalled that shortly after, during a meeting with staff and administration, where the intention was to discuss student support systems and collaboration, a meeting she had to attend late due to other commitments, she heard about such complaints. A teacher she sat next to reported:

> The administrator walked out, and then they [her colleagues] started talking … and then the administrator walked in, and then they [stopped] … one of my other coworkers said, yeah, they were talking about you when the administrator left." (31:55–33:03)

This incident speaks to a larger structural defense that operates within school walls. The defensiveness of settler colonialism is rarely explicit; it is instead defended through what is justified as professional monitoring, where colleagues view the policing of coworkers' behavior as benevolent quality control, rather than as a form of silencing and cultural erasure.

Rather than defending her coursework and approach, Samantha drew a firm boundary with her colleagues:

> I'm not going to justify anything that I'm doing with them … they're not my boss, they're my colleague, and if they don't think that I'm teaching, like, I can't imagine going into their classroom and just critiquing them." (33:03-34:02)

These firm boundaries could be misread as being non-collegial or even combative, but for Samantha they are instead a way of framing her own work as valid. She treats her colleagues with respect and expects the same in return. She was hired to teach content grounded in Indigenous philosophies which have their own history and norms. A practice that may lack coherence under the gaze of settler colonial expectations makes sense within the traditions she is employed to teach. That difference does not mean she should be required to justify her work to her peers anymore than they have to justify their work within her framwwork. At the same time, she does acknowledge that meeting certain expectations for professionalism is necessary, so her work is far from unconsidered:

> I can give you the lesson plan for it … there's a legit lesson plan, and it's got the standards, essential question … it's got everything that you need to, for you to, in your mind, legitimize it." (33:03–33:34)

What her colleagues read as a lack of structure is, for Samantha, a refusal to bend Indigenous pedagogy toward colonial legibility, and the boundary she sets is itself an act of insisting that Native practice need not justify itself to those comfortable with its erasure.

Sources of Support:

So, in the face of these various kinds of pushback, how does Samantha ground her practice? Samantha's standing as a licensed educator, her position within Siletz Valley Schools, and her strong ties within the Siletz community converge to create the very conditions that make a counteragency to settler colonial hegemony possible. Her education grants her a level of institutional authority, a foothold that is not easily dismissed by existing systems because it

speaks with an authority legible to those systems. That institutional position, however, becomes counterhegemonic because it is grounded in a web of local relationships, cultural memory, and place-based knowledge: hazel gathered at the right time, language that sparks curiosity, stories that circulate between generations. Together, these seemingly disparate aspects of her life converge and allow her to refuse the checkbox logic of SB 13 performance and instead enact a more substantive version of Indigenized curriculum despite the various forms of pushback she encounters.

Crucially, Samantha does not treat this convergence of support as private expertise; she does not think of it as simply something she knows. She sees it as relational, something born of ideas and of personal and affective relations with others. She shares this support openly with her colleagues by encouraging them, using her position to invite peers into a different way of being with knowledge and with the community. She welcomes other educators who show interest into the relational networks that sustain her practice. By normalizing a relational approach rather than a prescriptive understanding of what the dynamic is "supposed to be," she creates places of possibility where the intentions of settler colonial hegemony are not only critiqued but actively decentered by the possibilities born of decolonial refusal and relationality.

Conclusion, Refusal and Relation:

What emerges from Samantha's stories are not simple accounts of an unsuccessful policy or individual resistance, but instead are stories of a lived experience that expresses a far more complicated picture of curriculum as a complex assemblage shaped by forces that exceed individual human affect, discreet curriculum units, or even techniques of teaching. Samantha's stories make evident that curriculum does not neatly unfold mechanically from the passage of a

policy to classroom practice, nor does a policy like SB 13 simply get thwarted by forms of individual or institutional inertia. Instead, the resistance to the inclusion of Indigenous history and presence in K-12 curricula is active and dynamic, conceptual and affective, and most of all distributed. It is what might be called a more-than-human agential force, an assemblage of sedimented habits of settler colonial institutions, the persistent pull of pan-Indigenous symbols over place-based specificity, and the suspicion that greets culturally grounded pedagogy. Operating against these suppressive forces are what might be called assemblages of countercolonial agency. For Samantha, these included her certification and institutional position, her family history, her connections to Indigenous communities and persons who would understand what she is facing and expect her to work against it, and even the physical materials (hazel, cedar, feathers, basket patterns) that carry histories and expectations into the classroom. These forces are not passive; they act on teachers, students, and communities, shaping what feels possible, what feels legitimate, and what feels dangerously unfamiliar.

Samantha's experience reveals that a curriculum intended to be transformative cannot simply be additive; it cannot be tacked on as though the Indigenous cosmologies and identities fit neatly within the comfort of settler colonial acquisitiveness. It inevitably involves running up against the grain of the living, affectively charged discursive and institutional assemblages that make certain knowledges legible and render others outside of that scope. It requires challenging ideologies that treat Indigenous presence as either historical artifact or generic symbol. The colleague who mistakes a traditional game for a lack of structure, the child who cannot see Samantha as a living Native person, the blood-quantum math that silently teaches and normalizes erasure, these are not incidental obstacles but expressions of a settler colonial systems normalizing themselves. The habituated silences and the unexamined practices are not just

discreet mistakes that can be individually corrected. They are instead part of a larger systemic phenomena of settler colonialism that will constantly push back and adapt to interventions. To prepare preservice teachers to work in this context is to prepare them not only to deliver content but to recognize and resist these forces: to ask why a lesson on traditional games is dismissed as "frivolous" while a worksheet reads as "rigorous," to notice when discomfort becomes a rationale for silence, and to understand that the work of unsettling settler hegemony is never finished because the forces that uphold it are themselves alive, adaptive, and deeply embedded in the material and affective life of schools. It also will require teaching them that this work does not happen alone, as a heroic act of progressive educator will. Teachers need to build relations within communities that can support them as they swim against the circulating currents of discomfort that come with decentering settler colonial stories about the world.

What might these relations look like? Samantha's stories also point toward another kind of more-than-human agency: the vitality of Indigenous knowledge practices that refuse to be contained by colonial legibility. The hazel that must be gathered at the right time, the language that sparks a child's curiosity, the stories that circulate between students and their grandparents, her relations with community members that understand the challenges she faces and expect her to persist in the effort as best she can. These are not merely concepts to be delivered but forces that counter settler colonial futurities, reshaping the classroom in ways that challenge what is possible in schools. Their salience suggests that a transformative curriculum may have to be more complicated than something that is designed and gifted to educators in discreet packages of lesson plans. It is instead an expanded conception of curriculum and its purposes, one that can unsettle us. For preservice educators, this means cultivating a different kind of professional humility: not the hesitation of the non-Native teacher who withdraws for fear of overstepping,

but the humility of one who recognizes that curriculum is not a gift they decide to deliver or withhold but a relationship; It is not a set of lesson plans but a living practice. And it means being open to relationships in a community that can change us, trusting that the most profound learning often happens when we stop trying to control the story and instead let it gather momentum, circle back, and land somewhere more impactful than we could plan for, similar to the way Samantha's own pedagogy, grounded in refusal and relationship, already does.

Samantha does not simply resist the pressure to find comfort in habituated silences or superficial engagement with Indigenous themes. It her teaching instead proceeds from an entirely different source of authority, one rooted in relationship, responsiveness, and the unscriptable vitality of Indigenous knowledge. It replaces repressive containment and empty performance with presence and vibrance. This represents an understanding that curriculum is not a policy to be mechanically implemented, or a lesson plan that can be designed and delivered individually, but a way of being that can be cultivated in relation with others. A relation that settler colonialism attempts to flatten and contain into an extractable lesson, a deliverable that can be boiled down to an essence. Her work demonstrates that the most powerful counter to a curriculum designed to settle for the appearance of Indigeneity is not a better lesson plan but a different way of being with knowledge, one that settler hegemony may struggle to imagine, but one that creates space for itself regardless.

Chapter 6: Winter

Emphasis on Core Values & Authenticity:

Winter is a Citizen of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, as well as Cherokee, Wasco, and Grande Ronde; a cultural practitioner, educator, advocate, parent, and dedicated community member. Her current work is focused on attempting to provide resources and advice on engaging Indigenous knowledge in places historically not designed to receive it. This position was created in hopes of providing guidance for non-Indigenous students and educators to be given more substantive knowledge about Indigenous people and move past performative engagement. Sadly, while these positions are becoming more common, they also tend to serve as a safeguard against critique of non-engagement with communities pushed to the periphery, rather than enabling formative and substantive change within districts. Winter, however, pushes back against this tendency and creates visibility for Indigenous presence.

Similar to Samantha, Winter frames her work in the context of being a storyteller; her framing strays from Samantha's in some foundational ways, whereas Samantha's emphasis on stories is to articulate students' and colleagues' questions in ways that make their connections to answers deeper, and in many ways causing those stories to take on a particular life of their own. Winter's emphasis on stories, instead, is to embody and express lessons on ethics. Samantha's stories are deeply personal and often contemporary; Winter's storytelling practices are more cultural and often esoteric: creation stories, stories of relationships with more-than-human agents, and stories that instill a deep sense of connection to place and being outside of anthropocentrism.

Winter's stories are also bound by cultural practices and traditions that challenge classrooms to reconsider what it means to be culturally responsive. She raises an underlying

concern about curriculum that centers Indigenous knowledge, which others have voiced but are rarely given a 'shape' beyond cryptic sentiments that K-12 classrooms aren't built to receive certain knowledges. She explains this through the way stories operate within Indigenous communities: certain stories are told only at certain times of the year, in certain places, and are meant to articulate complex ideas through relational discourses that Eurocentric audiences often treat as fanciful but that, within an Indigenous context, are deeply meaningful. There is an inherent risk of these stories being mistreated and disrespected if they are made widely available, but they also carry an authenticity[15] needed for transformative curriculum. This creates a cosmological and ontoepistemological tightrope: cultural stories are necessary for transformative curriculum; without them we risk falling back into a status quo of Indigenous representation, a reversion to comfortable silences and dismissiveness; but these stories are also something to be protected and respected, things which the Western canon has yet to demonstrate the ability to do when it pertains to Indigenous identity. Winter shares this complex struggle to represent the fullness of Indigeneity, but also the need to protect aspects of it that systems have not shown the ability to care for.

> "[A]s a storyteller, I think the stories to really emphasize in schools too are the ones that teach lessons about, like, kindness, and you know, about not taking so much from the land, and concepts that we try to teach in different ways, you know. We have a state mandate…Then they buy a curriculum, [when they] could have just turned…[to] certain programs, and people are in the community, and like, hey, what stories should we share, and now they're doing it after the fact" (1:44-3:12)

[15] "Authenticity" here is not an attempt to define a core truth or fixed essence. But instead, as a complex personhood, an irreducible, relational fullness of being that is often absent from performative engagement with Indigenous identity.

This shows a predilection, a desire from institutions such as K-12 classrooms to seek simple solutions for complex problems, rather than developing connections with community members, culture bearers, and entities that are already engaging in this work; schools and organizations purchase packaged curriculum which seeks to bypass difficult entanglements between stories, communities, and meaning. Winter goes on to discuss the significance and power of stories, but also how fragile they can be, and the practices that surround them:

> "[A] practice that a lot of storytellers that I've encountered and learned from are that we're only going to bring these ancient stories out during winter time…So then, we're not going to start in September with traditional stories…we're not going to talk about that till about December, and I've been trying to honor that, because it teaches concepts about seasons, about about respect [for the] ways we share our stories, and it's not just like, [sharing] about Red Riding Hood, which is a story I can tell anytime, or a song I can sing [anytime] like Twinkle, Twinkle, but if we're talking about social emotional things for our kids, and you know, really looking at our native population…If we talk about generational trauma, then all our kids really need social-emotional learning, and that encompasses all the kids in the classroom…It's a state mandate, so I think stories in that way can be shared, but I'm on the fence, though, as a storyteller too, and as a native person, of like, how much do I really share, right?" (3:05-4:30)

Here we see the beginning of this contention: the question of serving youth by offering them visibility into aspects of their culture and trying to articulate an authenticity lacking in classrooms. This visibility would help students develop Social Emotional Learning skills through articulations of relationality and reciprocity that would benefit not only Indigenous students, but all students. But then the step back and asking ourselves how much we get to or should share with systems and structures that have been historically violent to Indigenous identity. Is it appropriate to share something so deeply personal and place-based, and risk it being stripped of

its context, and the Western canon doing what it was built to do: make knowledge scalable and strip it of specificity? Winter shares this fear, not of individuals, but of systems, and complex, imbricated assemblages that seek extraction of Indigenous knowledge, while minimizing engagement with Indigenous identity;

> "[W]e have the story typed up, or you have me recorded, and you get to share it in January, but then am I telling every story? [out of season] I've only done that when it's…predominantly Siletz kids…I've gone into the local school here and said, "Hey, I'll come back, you know, three years later." [then I return] now their fifth graders, they remember the story, and they help me teach…a couple of the stories that we act out, I think those, stories that ground you in the land, of why certain animals are the way they are, why they live this way, or live in a certain area, [those] also bring perspective of science and social studies, it brings other lessons without even talking about that, so from story perspective, I think we are underutilized in the schools in that way, but at the same time I don't want every single story published in some [mass produced] book, and then someone profits off of…that's not what that was for." (4:30-5:15)

This tightrope of knowing our stories can do good things for communities that need them, and that we care about, while also realizing that mass production and stripping them of context, of their own authenticity, is a risk that happens when we make these deeply personal stories widely accessible. They are stripped of their meaning. Eva Garroute and Kathleen Westcott critique this very proclivity, expressing their, "concern about scholarly approaches that overanalyze and "tear apart" stories, become preoccupied with hidden meanings, exclude Native voices--or include them in ways that strip their authority. Others express frustration with researchers who demand disclosure, misconstrue themes, appropriate and objectify, or impose ill-fitting analytic categories." (2013, p.1)

Unwelcoming Spaces, The Appearance of Equity Mired in Performance:

When we discuss performative engagement with materials, the language itself runs the risk of being particularly "slippery."[16] The idea of something being performative is intended to signal that the engagement with those materials is surface-level and lacks depth, nuance, and complexity. This shows how even the language we use to critique settler colonialism is draped in meaning that requires careful unpacking. The struggle in K-12 spaces is that surface-level, performative engagement can feel meaningful and substantive precisely because it is new. Because Indigenous history and presence have been excluded, any mention of these features can appease administrators seeking to signal virtue and meet the stated goals of SB 13 while not engaging with the spirit[17] of the mandate.

These superficial engagements come in several forms that can feel substantive but lack depth. Events hosted or encouraged by schools that have an aura of Indigeneity but lack place-based specificity are common. For example, "Rock Your Mocs," a day when Native students are encouraged to wear moccasins, creates visibility and presence on the surface. At a deeper level, however, it reinforces a non-generative Pan-Indigeneity and can imply that other forms of Indigenous footwear are not to be worn on days outside this particular event. This shield of performance was challenged by Winter when one of the principals she worked with attempted to use "Rock Your Mocs" as a moral victory:

> "This last year, one of the principals was like, 'Well, you know they did Rock Your Mocs,' and I asked, 'Well, did you do that last year? You don't have to do that every year. I already sent things out to your teachers to do about restoration, [about] powwow, and really learning who are these [Native] people? What does this really mean

[16] "Slippery" refers to words or phrases that resist stable definition while carrying strong rhetorical, moral, or intellectual weight. Such terms often feel clear and meaningful in the moment, but when pressed, their meaning shifts or dissolves.

[17] "Spirit" as used in this context does not refer to an apparition, ghost, or immaterial substance. It instead refers to the intent or guiding purpose behind an act, text, or rule.

> for our Siletz tribal youth? What does it mean for all our people here? We don't always have to do [just] the romanticized part of our culture, right?'" (8:14-8:40)

This performative engagement, a comfortable romanticization of Native culture through a beautiful piece of footwear, may be a step in the right direction, but it also operates as a means of non-engagement with Indigenous realities. Winter's challenge speaks to this propensity to avoid uncomfortable truths in favor of performative engagement with pan-Indigenous iconography. Even when someone like Winter is in a position to provide resources and knowledge that could substantively connect students with a more authentic Indigenous curriculum and representation, the preference can still be for a romanticized surface:

> "[Students see that] I create the pretty moccasins. But all our history is not pretty, yeah, we could do rock your mocks, but we're going to have more conversations about the oldest shoe in the world. It's right here in Oregon, at the University of Oregon, and it's not a moccasin…I'm getting kind of mad, because now you just want romanticized; I just want the mini powwow, I just want this, you know, like, well, it's not always going to be that pretty picture that you want to paint…I don't think they understand how rude they seem to me, I don't try to take offense because I need to partner with them so they can help my native families, but in the end I'm like, it's how you talk to me, it's how you talk about the things we're doing, also, the priorities, what they set, [as if we're] an afterthought" (8:45-10:40)

This frustration is not unique. Similar discomfort arises when challenging systems that are themselves uncomfortable to confront. We want students to deepen their understanding of not only the beautiful aspects of Indigenous culture, but also the history of violence and the brilliance of our continued survivance.

This resistance to Indigenous place-based presence is resilient, even with the opportunity to spark curiosity and deepen students' knowledge of Oregon's history beyond simply having

students wear their moccasins, and instead create a connection: Oregon is home to the world's oldest running shoe, the Fort Rock Sandals (Connolly, 2025). A piece of fascinating Oregon history that have been carbon-dated to 9,300 and 10,500 years old that serves as a testament not only to Indigenous ingenuity and deep ecological knowledge, but also speaks to a long-standing human presence.

Authentically engaging with Indigenous presence in K-12 schools requires something larger than planned curriculum and scheduled events; it requires a flexibility and responsiveness capable of holding complexity rather than reducing it to what is comfortable. Settler colonialism seeks comfort in performative engagement because performance allows institutions to appear responsive while leaving underlying assumptions intact. Authenticity, however (not as a core truth but as a complex personhood), cannot be represented, and transformation cannot occur by performance alone; it instead is created through ongoing, place-based relationships that complicate what representation means, not only what is beautiful, but also what is difficult.

Holistic Learning and the Limits of Curriculum:

For Winter, holistic learning exposes the limits of curriculum because it necessitates creating space for spiritual[18], relational, and land-based practices that cannot be scripted in advance or reduced to a simple lesson plan. This leads to a contradiction Winter named earlier: K-12 education, as it currently exists, may not be equipped to facilitate transformative Indigenous curriculum.

[18] Spiritual" here is used in a distinctly different way than prior here it is used not in a romanticized or performative sense, but to name a deep and complex engagement with cultural practice. It is offered as the closest approximation in English for a relational connection to culture, land, and ancestors that Indigenous languages and lifeways articulate with as much specificity as possible in a language with limited ways to articulate Indigenous practice.

Part of the challenge is that Eurocentric institutions tend to elevate the aspects of Indigenous identity that feel most legible or least disruptive. While Eurocentric society has shown itself to be violent toward Indigenous concepts, storytelling is often treated as the primary example of a practice Indigenous communities feel protective of in relation to academic acquisitiveness. In educational spaces, non-Indigenous educators often treat storytelling as an easier-to-accommodate practice; the image of a Native elder or culture bearer stepping into classrooms and sharing culturally significant stories feels transformative, yet it carries relational and spiritual weight that resists standardization. Our stories are a significant cultural practice: they are how we relate to the world and share our complex relationships within it. They are also the best means we have to describe complex relationships - with land, time, culture, and more-relationships from which we are not separate but in which we are deeply embedded. Other aspects of Indigenous identity would require a major shift in contemporary structures and an openness that is currently absent from the systems in which Indigenous youth are educated. This does not mean Indigenous representation is impossible; it does mean that some aspects of Indigenous identity and culture may be irreconcilable with current educational structures, such as a lack of willingness to engage in a holistic learning model or a lack of clarity about how to begin creating that space. Winter shared not only the need to create these opportunities for Indigenous students but also the need to conceptualize creating space for non-Indigenous students to begin to deepen their understanding of Indigenous complexity:

> "A holistic learning…within each tribal community [is] missing that spiritual piece, right?... How your mind is connected to what you're doing, and that's a concept I don't think we talk about. If we invite an elder or we invite somebody in that's not part of our school, teachers don't know how to deal with that." (40:39-41:02)

So, what does it mean to prepare teachers to understand these complex dynamics of Indigenous representation, whether it involves a Native person offering insight to your classroom, setting firm boundaries about appropriate requests to be made of them, or being willing to step up when Indigenous people cannot always be present? It means offering autonomy to guest speakers whenever possible, challenging educators to step into the conversations that make them uncomfortable, move beyond performance, and get as close as possible to a complex authenticity.

Building Space for Different Understandings:

Guest lecturers, speakers, and presenters in classes feels like a given; educators feel discomfort discussing the difficult histories and complexities of settler colonialism, and a culture which they may not be a part of, and which the education system as it currently exists does not know how to make space for, as it was not created with those identities in mind. So, educators seek to compensate for their lack of background knowledge on Indigenous history and identity as well as disguise their discomfort with the more difficult subject matter. This often leads to a sense of entitlement to have access to the stories of Indigenous people and Indigenous knowledge.

By treating Indigenous guest speakers as a given in K-12 spaces, educators quietly shift the burden of Indigenous education onto Indigenous community members, while leaving non-Indigenous educators outside the relational and intellectual work that substantive engagement requires. The Indigenous cultural practitioner, lecturer, or knowledge holder becomes a brief interloper rather than an transformative presence, and once they leave, the classroom often returns to the settler colonial status quo. What remains unexamined is the structural discomfort

itself, the fact that teacher preparation, curriculum design, and school culture have not been changed to hold Indigenous knowledge as something to be integrated and transformative rather than a performative isolated instance. If educators rely exclusively on guests to deliver difficult material, they may never develop the capacity to sit with discomfort and understand it not as an obstacle to avoid but as a signal of a deeper pedagogical shift. The problem, then, is not simply a lack of background knowledge; it is the failure to transform the educational conditions that make such knowledge feel optional, supplementary, or external to the classroom.

This propensity to bring in guest speakers to cover topics that educators are uncomfortable discussing is neither new nor unique to Indigenous-centered curriculum. The use of film and guests to cover Indigenous topics has been regarded as an effective tool for building empathy with non-Indigenous students (Grogan et al., 2021; Sharma & Shannon-Baker, 2023). While this practice is understandable, and while there is genuine value in having Indigenous people represent Indigenous cosmologies, articulate the complexities of sovereignty, and address difficult, often heartbreaking histories, the problem arises when this becomes an entitlement to Indigenous peoples' time and resources. Enlisting this service is often treated as inherently virtuous: educators pursue opportunities to work alongside Indigenous cultural practitioners and help students understand Indigenous identity in ways not previously permitted in K-12 spaces. Unfortunately, this can give way to educators treating these opportunities as a virtuous favor offered to Indigenous communities rather than as visitors doing the favor of helping students deepen their understanding. When Indigenous people critique this attitude as an entitlement, naming the assumption that educators are generously opening their classrooms to people who hope to break silences as itself a problem, educators may respond by positioning themselves as morally superior and accusing Indigenous people of shutting down dialogue. As Aileen Moreton-

Robinson (2015) puts it, when Native people disagree with the terms of engagement, educators "discursively deploy virtue [and]...take possession of the moral high ground by blaming Indigenous peoples for not wanting to work in harmony" (p. 181). In this way, performative inclusion does not simply fail to challenge colonial entitlement; it actively protects that entitlement by recasting Indigenous critique as ingratitude or obstruction.

So, what are we left with when we challenge teachers to be open enough not to dictate their expectations to guests, and not to treat guests as though they are the beneficiaries of educators providing their classrooms? What does it mean to engage in transformative Indigenous knowledge, and how does that shift the conversations we have not just about Indigenous people, but also about other topics? Winter shared her perspective on working alongside Indigenous guest speakers, and her own experiences of working with students on place-based Native knowledge:

> "I'm like, you just let them do their thing, right? If they're going to use sage, pray, sing a song, or say some words, that is truly learning about our tribal people. I think it's hard to teach about Native concepts without teaching the spiritual side, that connection to land. Like if we're learning about camas, the science part, right? What compounds are we learning about in that root? You cook it and eat it; what is that? Why is it helping my body be healthy? We're learning those science pieces, but to go gather it, some people put tobacco down. My family, we sing; we talk about singing to the land. We talk about how things are living, truly living. There's actually science: I tell my kids there are science experiments and scientists that research that people sing to their plants and show love to the land, and we don't talk about those things. And how do I take my school bus out there? We're going to go to the tribal farm, and I'm going to show you how I gather camas with my family; I'm not going to make up some lesson. Connecting to the land is truly connecting to my ancestors, because I'm touching the same land they did…the same camas that continues to grow in this place over and over again. So I think that's a concept that's pretty hard to talk about with teachers and in curriculum. Some tribes barely touch

> on that part, but then you bring people in, and you're not sure sometimes where it's actually going to go when they're teaching, but you're bringing in people that are knowledgeable about what the concept is, so I think that's important." (39:44-42:40)

This is not an argument for abandoning structure, but for refusing to let structure become a mechanism of containment. When educators stop treating Indigenous guests as one-off engagements and instead relate to them as knowledge keepers with authority over their own teaching, the classroom becomes a site of relational learning rather than performative inclusion. The challenge, then, is not only to make room for Indigenous knowledge, but to let that knowledge unsettle the assumptions teachers bring to their work about what counts as evidence, where learning happens, and who has the right to teach. In this way, the questions Winter raises extend beyond Indigenous education: they ask whether schools can become places that honor living, spiritual, and place-based knowledge, or whether they will continue to reduce even the most complex forms of learning to the comfortable shape of the existing curricula.

Conclusion:

Winter's reflections make clear that the challenge of Indigenous education is not exclusively a problem of representation, access, or even inclusion. Instead, it is a problem with how curriculum itself is conceptualized. When schools treat Indigenous knowledge as content to be added, guests to be scheduled, or cultural practices to be performed, they reproduce the very settler colonial logics they claim to seek to interrupt. Winter's work points instead toward a more demanding possibility: curriculum cannot be considered as a neutral container for predetermined outcomes, but as a living practice shaped by relationships that extend beyond the classroom; relationships with land, stories, ancestors, seasonal cycles, and more-than-human agents.

These more-than-human forces operate not as decorative themes but as active participants in learning. The camas that continues to grow in the same place over generations, the stories that cannot be told out of season, the land that holds ancestral memory, the song offered to the earth before gathering, all of these extend the boundaries of curriculum as it is currently understood and practiced. They require educators to recognize that knowledge is not simply delivered by teachers or consumed by students. It emerges through protocols of respect, through the presence of knowledge keepers, and through a willingness to be guided by places and practices have not historically found purchase in Western schooling systems. For preservice teachers, this means developing not only content knowledge but also the capacity to be uncomfortable, to listen without judgment, and to allow lessons to unfold in ways they cannot fully control.

At the community and school levels, this requires a shift from seeking comfort in performative engagement toward building relationships that can hold complexity. Schools must learn to work alongside Indigenous cultural practitioners without treating their presence as an entitlement or a favor. They must recognize that some knowledge cannot be extracted, packaged, or scaled, and that engaging Indigenous-centered curriculum is as much about protecting stories as it is about sharing them. For teacher preparation programs, this means cultivating educators who can sit with the tension between offering visibility to Indigenous students and protecting the integrity of Indigenous knowledge within systems that have not yet shown themselves capable of caring for it.

Lastly, a curriculum that challenges settler colonial hegemony will not look like a better package of materials or a more inclusive list of guest speakers. It will look like a set of commitments: to relationship over extraction, to responsiveness over standardization, to spiritual and place-based knowledge over what is merely legible, and to a complex authenticity that

refuses to separate beauty from history or presence from survivance. Winter's insights suggest that such a curriculum is not impossible, but it requires educators to be willing to be unsettled and to understand that the land, the stories, and the ancestors are not outside the curriculum. They are already at its center, waiting for schools to learn how to listen.

Chapter 7: Keith

Refusing Urgency, 7 Generations, and Community

So far, this study has focused on the need for flexibility. As systems of settler colonialism shift in response to the means we use to avoid or mitigate its harmful influence, we need to consider what it means to teach people to respond (or, more ideally, anticipate) with alacritous flexibility to how settler colonial ideologies reassert themselves as a baseline relation to our world. In this next case study, Keith provides a brilliant example of an anticipatory counter-agential teaching practice, one that is always already in motion and position him to respond quickly when settler colonialism attempts to reassert itself in his coursework and broader work with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Keith embodies this flexibility even within his position at Siletz Valley Schools where he serves as a cultural arts and language educator. His job entails working to develop a standing relationship with the tribe as an entity, bringing in tribal members to work with students in his role as Tribal Liaison, assisting with student behavior, and, when necessary (as if all this were not enough) stepping in as the bus driver and athletic director.

Keith's position is complex and involves a wide range of relationship dynamics with students and colleagues through his varied responsibilities. He encounters students and colleagues across classrooms, administrative interactions, extracurricular programs, and everyday interactions that anyone in a more rigid role would not. These connections are informed by his upbringing as a community member of Siletz and enabled by his citizenship in the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, which connects him to tribal leaders, culture bearers, and respected community members whose perspectives and knowledge are often excluded from K–12 spaces. Because these relationships are not incidental but rooted in a complex web of

community standing, lived responsibility, and relationality, Keith is able to bring into the school different forms of authority, care, and cultural knowledge that settler colonial school systems typically push to the periphery. Through this understanding, his multiple roles do more than stretch him across seemingly disparate tasks; instead, they enable him to mediate between the school and Indigenous community at a deep level, carrying Indigenous presence into spaces where it would otherwise be absent.

This workload, on the face, may seem intense; however, the emphasis that Keith places on humility and connection, and his desire to bring in specialists and enlist cultural practitioners, allow him to break down multiple presumed knowledge hierarchies (Settler colonial vs Indigenous knowledge, cultural expert vs cultural novice, insider vs outsider). Rather than position himself as the sole authority on topics he emphasizes to his students that he knows a little bit about aspects of cultural teachings, and can guide them in their interests, and will bring in culture bearers when appropriate. Due to his own interests he also continues to develop his own knowledge base and understandings alongside the students. During our conversation, he shared:

> I get some information from a tribal leader, a tribal elder, or someone who has more knowledge than me in the area, because I try, and I want to make sure I come from a place that gives them the best insight and direction I possibly can. I don't know everything; I know a little bit, and so I want to enhance my little bit to enhance other kids' little bit, you know. (1:21-1:45)

The humility that Keith shares with his students fundamentally shifts the ability to tell them that he does not know everything, but that they are in a collaborative effort to co-construct information not just between himself and his students, but with the elders and leaders that he builds with community leaders.

> "When I go out and talk to people, if there's an area I don't know—like carving canoe paddles…I ask people who have done it before. I ask, "Okay, do you have anything else?" And when I ask the right people, I get some direction and direct-source material, like documents from [tribal elder], so that once I understand it, I can tell the kids. In our native drum class, we do powwow drum, hand drum, and some Nee Dosh (Feather Dance). I tell the tribal-member kids, "We will teach you nee-dosh," and non-tribal kids stick with hand drum and round drum, because there are some songs I'm asked not to have non-tribal people sing. I want that background so I don't offend anyone. We also teach protocol…like when to stand for honor songs and flag songs…so the kids understand when certain songs are tribal-member-only, not as segregation but as protocol." (1:45-2:34)

As covered in previous chapters, protocols for cultural practices are numerous and significant, and fear of misstepping often leads educators to avoid aspects of cultural representation that entail a risk of doing something inappropriate. The practices Keith has instituted in his classroom create space that acknowledges these protocols and treats them as learning opportunities rather than as a risk it is better to avoid. Students understand these protocols as a language of respect rather than one of exclusion. Through these classroom practices and approaches, students are exposed to Indigenous knowledge in ways that respect the boundaries of who is entitled to know some thingsor to act on that knowledge, while deepening all students understanding of Indigenous culture and practices.

Because a class centered heavily on Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices is shaped by those practices' fluid and protean character, it must operate significantly differently than many imagine K-12 classrooms do. This knowledge often doesn't lend itself to quizzes or discreet assignments. On any given day, Keith may have his students whittling, weaving, drumming, practicing language, or gathering Indigenous plants. His students understand his classroom and, by extension, the learning they experience there as relational and fluid. Keith

describes this fluidity, explaining how he moves between weaving, carving, language, and other practices in response to students' interests and identities, all while emphasizing the protocols that govern particular forms of knowledge:

> "With weaving, I teach all students, but I mostly take tribal members out to gather cedar cambium, spruce roots, and maidenhair ferns, and I teach the differences between cedars. With paddles, I had to learn things I didn't know, like never putting a paddle on the ground, and I use language…even though I'm not fluent. I don't think you have to master something to teach it; I need to know maybe twenty percent more than the kids, and as they catch up, I learn twenty percent more. I contact people from Tulalip, the Chinook canoe family, and others, because our kids come from many different bands, so I can't teach only one style; I teach a Rogue end, a Chinook end, and a flat end [paddle shape], and let the kids choose. I also use tribal enrollment by last name, not individual students, to learn the family bands."

This respect for student curiosity and the willingness to engage that curiosity offers students ownership over their educational practice. For Indigenous students, it grants them the ability to be seen in their fullness and the freedom to not know about their culture without shame; instead, not knowing becomes an opportunity to learn. Keith's connection to the community provides him with the resources to discover students' familial lineage and connections to histories they may have lost. Non-Indigenous students, in turn, come to see their peers as living, breathing representatives of a culture that many have been surrounded by for their entire lives but have never truly recognized.

Keith describes the necessity for the classroom to not be a set space; it needs to flex and move in response to the interests and identities of his students. Both the setting and his pedagogy need to adjust to the requirements of the material he will be working through. His description of his space as a living being, something that must move, and breath, and he himself as an active learner, and as a person who regrets not asking more questions as a youth growing up in Siletz

offers his students access points to relate to him, and the shifting space that they occupy makes Keith's classroom an instructive representation of the necessity of adaptability when engaging in transformative, Indigenous-centered curriculum, he articulates that humility in this passage;

> My classroom is kind of an amoeba; it shifts, changes, and whatever the next person wants to try, we'll try it. If I don't know it, I'll go learn it. I kick myself for not asking [tribal elders] questions back in the late 70s and early 80s, so now I try to get kids to ask the question: "How do you do this?" I would love to master something, but I don't think the kids need to wait that long for me to master it…you have to be on the way to master it, but you also can, along that way, you could be teaching, because if you wait to everyone master something to teach it, there's been no teaching going on for a lot of years (4:21-7:59)

This curiosity and willingness to admit that he does not know is infectious; the humility is not an excuse to disengage; it is instead a call to develop a strong work ethic, connect with as much of one's culture as possible, and, in doing so, students mature, they understand relational ethics, humility, and the significance of honoring a culture, even if that culture is not their own.

Keith's framing of his classroom as an amoeba, a living, shifting entity that responds to the curiosities and needs of those within it, encapsulates the alacritous flexibility that transformative, Indigenous-centered education demands. His willingness to admit what he does not know, paired with his commitment to seek out those who do, models for his students a form of learning rooted not in mastery as an endpoint but in relational responsibility as an ongoing practice. In this, Keith resists the settler-colonial impulse to position the educator as an authoritative, static repository of knowledge and instead embodies what it means to learn alongside students, with community, and through protocol. His classroom becomes a space where Indigenous knowledge is not treated as supplementary but as central, where cultural practices are not flattened into representation but honored through their complexity, and where

students (Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike) are invited into relationship with knowledge that settler schooling has long marginalized. What Keith offers, then, is not simply a model of flexibility but a model of humility as pedagogy: a refusal to let the fear of misstepping justify the erasure of Indigenous presence, and a demonstration that the work of cultural revitalization in K–12 spaces is not contingent on perfection but on presence, persistence, and the willingness to ask the right questions, even if those questions come decades late.

Energy, Not as Illusory, but as Relational:

Keith spoke often about cultivating or attending to the energy in his classroom. Energy, in this case, didn't refer to the relative levels of activity among his students. Instead it seemed to refer to an effervescent idea of something intangible. A student sitting in one place quietly for an hour while working with a piece of wood could be described as having good energy. This is an example of something I think is a common experience, Native communities reaching for a word that is as close an approximation of a relationship, when an exact word for what they are describing is not available in the English language. The relation of energy to which Keith referred is not understood as an abstract or fanciful force but, instead, is a kind of intentional ethic rooted in the understanding that the quality of attention, intention, and care one brings to a creative act (carving, weaving, drumming) shapes what emerges from that act.

Keith's approach to energy reflects a broader Indigenous epistemological orientation in which the maker, the materials, and the process are understood as interconnected. Creating while frustrated, distracted, or disconnected risks embedding that state in the object and the relationship it carries. The inverse is also true: approaching creative work in a good headspace and with genuine enjoyment is understood to produce work that holds and transmits that positive

relational quality. This understanding positions creative practice not merely as the generation of a final product, but as an ethical and relational act that requires awareness of one's own emotional and mental state. Keith considered it important not only to communicate that with educators, but also for those educators to know what to do when that situation arises, when students advocate for themselves and their mental state. A step further, it also requires students to have the skill to self-evaluate and understand their energy and its effects on others, human and more-than-human alike.

This extends beyond acknowledging and providing space for students to share their struggles; it is also about creating the circumstances for students to partake in self-care and investing in process over product. This resists the settler-colonial urgent push for accomplishing the goal of education, and instead focuses on thoughtful engagement and student presence. Instead, Keith makes space for students to recognize when they are not in a good space and step back; in those moments, he offers cultural practices such as smudging, tobacco blessings, etc. This pedagogical commitment creates space for students to center themselves before engaging in the work, and the work itself unfolds at a pace that allows for genuine engagement, as he explains:

> I believe the energy you put into a project…into learning math, learning language, learning to read…is some of the energy you get out. The energy you put into weaving, into gathering, into working on a paddle. If I notice you're not having a good energy day, I ask, "What energy are you putting into your work?" And if they're like, "Oh, I'm so pissed off," I say, "Take a break. It will be here when you come back. No one's going to take it." Then center yourself. We have smudge here. Our kids come out and smudge if they want to. I never force, "Hey, you need to go smudge." That's not me. If you ask for it, I'll supply it. We have some tribal tobacco from up at the farm, if you want to bless yourself that way. You tell me what you want to do. Before we went to Seaside, we

> chose…we had some natural tobacco, other tobacco, and Native tobacco. I said, "You guys choose what we're going to take up there. What do you want to do?" I'm not going to force it. Because same thing…the energy they put in is the energy they're going to get out. And then be patient. People in this cell phone, fifteen-second reel life want fifteen seconds to be satisfied, but you've got to slow down. Fifteen seconds should be twenty minutes, and twenty minutes should turn into an hour. Invest twenty minutes into a thing without racing through it, rather than flipping the screen every fifteen seconds to watch the next reel. That's a tough thing…getting kids to slow down. For me, it's about slowing down, because you can race to the end. When I got my first master's, I raced to the end [took double classes], and then I realized, "Wait, did I learn that, or did I just race through it to get to the end goal?" (13:59-16:28)

This relational practice of taking time and giving thoughtful attention to the tasks we ask of students, to focus on the journey over destination, is multilayered; it does not simply ask the students to take time away, but also to reflect on intentionality and the energy they are putting into the tasks they complete throughout the day. Keith takes this a step further; it is not just about students removing themselves. He offers cultural tools and resources upon student request to help ground them in cultural practices; he offers choice where teachers are often forced to offer only pressure and urgency. While the skills are significant, he extends the knowledge of slowing down to his own experience; in this way, Keith's classroom emphasis on experience over outcome is not inefficient; it becomes a site of resistance where the energy students bring is honored as constitutive of the learning itself.

This practice of intentional energy is not isolated to the classroom; Keith takes this connection to intentional practice and ensuring students are in a good headspace and extends its influence into the Siletz community. Again, Keith takes effort to integrate the classroom practices into the Siletz community; this community connection is often viewed as a happenstance to curriculum, educators share knowledge with students and students filter it

through their experiences embedded within the community, or educators may make themselves available to community members questions. Keith takes all of these practices a step further and actively fosters students' care and intention when they practice Indigenous knowledge. He uses their classroom procedures to influence their connection to community and more-than-human relationships in direct and profound ways:

> Well, like our kids, like even when we pull off the paddles and make a little curlicue (wood shaving), we put that in a box over there. Then that box over there is picked up [and taken] down to sweat [lodge], and that's what they put in to start that fire. So they know that the energy you even put into a [wood shaving] is going to go bless somebody else, so respect it…Even the big pine nuts with pine cones, we pull pine nuts out of, we take that down to burn…it's just full circling everything, and understanding that just don't throw it away, I mean, if we can…use this all the way to its nth degree, …You're honoring everything from that tree, [everything] that tree gave all the way down [to the] shavings…we [are] honoring it all the way to it becoming back to the air, going to another tree, starting that whole cycle, C02 into the cycle, and then come back out as oxygen…Some of the kids don't even know they're learning it, then after a while, they'll be like, yeah, no, they said to me, make sure this is going here [into the sweat lodge pile], because this then is going to become fire starter for the sweat, and then people go down sweat, and so then we have a couple of our middle schoolers that are going down, being fire tenders…they're learning that part, and so they're so they're gaining all that stuff, and I love it, because once they do that, then they ask the right question, or they say this was probably off my paddle, this will make a good fire start, they're taking ownership and honoring that." (22:36- 24:20)

Connecting the relational ethics of energy to community cultural practices and doing so in a project-based classroom where cultural knowledge is not merely expressed but discovered, embodied, and respected, is at the heart of a transformative curriculum.

Cultural practices that encourage students to be patient not only with processes but with themselves; protocol that is understood not as a hindrance but as a language of respect; and the

carrying of these practices into the community in both intangible ways and ways that grant students ownership and connection: these are what become possible when structures are challenged not through aggression but through the million small choices an educator makes when interacting with students.

This relational ethic of energy is not time-bound. Keith also challenges students to consider their work in light of the Seven Generations principle, understanding that the actions they take now must be undertaken thoughtfully and with people they may never meet in mind.

Intergenerational Practice as Responsibility:

Responsibility is difficult to teach students; in K-12 spaces, it often gets framed as a commitment or obligation to the structures of education. Students enter schools and are told to be responsible for their education, for their homework, for the books they are lent; all of which is important. However, that responsibility often lacks context; it is not framed as developing habits that will serve them, but as a request for compliance. What does it mean to instead frame responsibility as an intergenerational practice, one that connects students to a complex and imbricated relationship with ancestors both past and future and understand them both as present?

In many Indigenous communities (Siletz included), this has come to be framed as the Seven Generations principle, which teaches that decisions made today should be considered in light of their consequences for the seven generations that follow, carrying the deeper lesson that we are currently living as the seventh generation of our own ancestors' consideration. If included in a K–12 context, this principle challenges us as educators to move beyond short-term outcomes and instead calls for pedagogical practices that cultivate students' sense of responsibility to future generations and an understanding that they are the product of generations who strove to provide

them with opportunity. Learning thus becomes an act with ethical implications that extend far beyond the present and are not bound exclusively by institutions; it is a relational ethic. As Bryan Brayboy and Emma Maughan assert, "Knowledge is not what some possess, and others do not; it is a resourceful capacity of being that creates the context and texture of life. Thus, knowledge is not a commodity that can be possessed or controlled by educational institutions but is a living process to be absorbed and understood" (2009, p. 15). Students' relationship to knowledge should not be understood or engaged with as though it were static; it should be brought into relationship with their families, communities, and, by extension, their ancestors, past, present, and future - simultaneously.

Throughout our conversation, Keith and I found our discussion pulled beyond the classroom. We found ourselves talking about the community of Siletz, comparing our upbringings, sharing stories of people we knew, laughing, occasionally stumbling across the sting of loss, and reminiscing about the brilliant elders who had shaped our lives. We then shared stories of students we had in common and how hopeful they made us; we laughed more, but that laughter was mixed with something deeper—a hope that the choices we were making would lead to something meaningful and profound, even if we did not get to experience it. This notion that future possibilities exist in the now and that they shape our decisions as we move towards the future, lies at the core of the growing scholarship on Indigenous futurities. This is not just an academic concept. It also shapes our interactions as educators with Indigenous youth. Keith articulated this relationship concisely and in a grounded way that made it feel tangible:

> "I think the benefit is that whole idea of seven generations of history and it could be oral, project-based learning, that in seven generations I won't see the fruition of what I'm doing here become a reality. In seven generations, I'm going to be long gone off this earth, but if my grandkids, when they become grandparents, say, "I learned this from

> Papa Keith. Papa Keith showed me how to do this. I'm showing you how to do this," and then it hits that seventh generation, that's impacting them. But also the negative part: if you have evil in your heart or evil in your ways, you can teach an evil thing, or not a wholesome thing, and that can be visited down seven generations. You can cause trauma, or you can heal trauma. When I was in middle school, [my family] took us all out in the woods and taught us, "Here's how you harvest an animal." They let us take knives and figure out how to skin it, how to cut meat off. We were cutting long strips, [saying] "This is easy," and then it makes meat you can't even eat. You chew for like half an hour. Then they taught us, "Okay, cross-grain." But those teachings are still locked in my brain. You have to be careful, because you can very easily imprint negativity on a young student." (25:15-27:15)

The hopeful tone in Keith's voice was not dampened by the potential to do bad; he shares the story of cleaning the deer not as an interjection, but as an articulation of the relational responsibility of working with youth. His understanding of deer cleaning was shaped by his interaction with his family when he was young; his grandchildren will have a similar relationship to this practice because of how he was taught. This extends outwards in both directions. It extends to time immemorial[19]. Keith goes on to discuss the responsibility that comes from working with youth in relationship to the Seven Generations;

> You do one good thing, but you've got to do twenty-five good things to make it a habit. On the other side, sometimes you can do two bad things and it's a bad habit, and it'll take fifty to overcome that. So I always keep very cognizant in my brain: in a setting like this, if I do something negative, that's going to take twenty-five goods to replace it. And I still do negative things; I'm not perfect, but I'm cognizant of it now. If I do something that's not super nice or puts out a hateful thought, I try to go back and talk to that person: "Hey, I shouldn't have said that. I was talking out of my head. That was a frustration. You don't

[19] Time immemorial is an Indigenous concept that refuses settler-colonial assumptions that time is linear, progressive, and separable into discrete units. Instead, it positions Indigenous presence on ancestral lands as extending backward and forward beyond humam record, grounding sovereignty, and cultural practice in an ongoing relationship with place that precedes and exceeds colonial frameworks.

> have to forgive me; I'm not asking for forgiveness. I want you to know I made a mistake, and I need to try and make amends for it." That's a danger of being in a room like this and working with tribal kids: if they share something personal that might not be safe, you have to go with your next point of maybe sharing that with other people. It does make some kids scared or upset, but if they know they can trust me in here, and I tell them I'm going to do what's best for them in here, [then] when I see them out in the community, if I see them making a poor decision, I'll pull them aside. I won't correct them in front of people, because we have that relationship. "Hey, should you be using the F-bomb?" And they say, "Well, the music." I say, "Yes, I know the music. But if you go through our Tolowa book over there and you find me the curse words, you can use every one of them you want. Every one of them, ask, "are there any?" [and] I say, "No." (27:15-32:10)

Keith once again extends this relationship with students into the community, teaching them to carry themselves responsibly and to represent themselves and their families with respect. He challenges them to question the habits they fall into, to understand the work it takes to break those habits, and he connects these lessons to culture.

Intergenerational responsibility is not about carrying ourselves with respect and responsibility when it is easy; it requires doing so at all times. This serves as a reminder that bad decisions become habits, and habits define character. The relational ethic of the Seven Generations is not only a responsibility to the generations that come after one's own time but also an honoring of the generations that came before.

Respect, Responsibility and an Undeniable Presence:

Building student connections to community and extending teaching practice beyond the classroom can be powerful. Keith shared that community practice, being present for his students,

and making their efforts visible ultimately resulted in an invitation for his drum class[20] to perform at the Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) Track Finals at Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon. Keith understood the moment not simply as a performance opportunity but as an act of pedagogical and political presence; a chance for his students to carry protocols, songs, and the weight of nine federally recognized tribes into a space historically unfamiliar with Indigenous identity, embroiled in settler ideology and watched by thousands. The meaning of this visibility was not lost on him: how his students conduct themselves, how they hold the drum, how they respond to questions about smudging and sage, all become lessons offered to an audience that may never have encountered Indigenous cultural practice outside of stereotypes. In this context, respect and responsibility are not abstract values but embodied expectations, and the students' presence on that field becomes undeniable testimony of Indigenous persistence. As Keith recounts:

> We were in front of about 14,000 people at Hayward Field, and I told our kids, "Just look at the drummer across from you…that's who you're drumming for…but you're sharing knowledge with a lot of people." They started looking up and realizing what 14,000 people look like. I said, "They're listening, and they're watching your every word, your song, how you conduct yourself, how you walk out there, when you tap the drum and touch your heart afterward. They're learning from all of that, and even though you don't know you're teaching them, you are teaching." Our land acknowledgment acknowledges all nine tribes in the state of Oregon, not just Kalapuya, because the University of Oregon takes tribal members from across the nation. We acknowledge all nine tribes because each has put a piece in the puzzle. When our kids drummed and they went through the nine tribes' land acknowledgment…you'd hear people in the stands yell out, and the kids understood, "That's who you're making this moment for, that's who you're acknowledging." That sense of pride…"I'm not better than you, I'm different than you,

[20] The class performance group was named *Crooked River*.

> and this is why"...those kids deserve those moments. Not many Siletz tribal members have ever spoken in front of 14,000 people, and they did it. Now someone from Milwaukie High School, inner-city Portland, who has probably never seen a drum, is exposed to it. I told them, "You have 28,000 eyes on you." Afterward, I said, "You conducted yourselves in a great way." One [audience member] asked, "Why are you tapping the drum and touching your chest?" And they said, "Because that drum blessed me, and we're taking the blessing of the drum to our hearts." We smudged down by the starting line gate, and people came over…smelling the sage, asking, "What is that you're burning?" We told them it was long sage and white sage, gifted to our drum, and that we gather mugwort, which is coastal. I said to the kids, "There's a lot of master's degrees walking around here, professors who love track because it's Track Town USA. They have so much education, but they don't have that piece you have. That's why you're unique. (42:41-50:26)

The message Keith and his students carried that day was: *I'm not better than you; I'm different, and this is why.* This profound assertion of presence and identity captures the significance and possibility of an Indigenous-centered curriculum, like SB 13.

Conclusion:

Keith's pedagogy resists easy extraction. To distill his practice into a set of strategies such as bringing in elders, teaching protocols, lettting students choose their projects, slowing down, being thoughtful, and entering projects with an emphasis on process, would be to miss the deeper relationality that makes such strategies meaningful in the first place. What emerged from our conversation is not a method but an orientation: a way of being in relation to students, community, knowledge, and the more-than-human world that cannot be reduced to bullet points. This framing challenges preservice teachers and teacher educators to confront the limits of curriculum as it is conventionally imagined: as a document, a scope and sequence, a set of

standards to be met. Keith's classroom suggests that curriculum is something far more complex: a living field of relationships through which Indigenous knowledge circulates, protocols are honored, energy is tended, and responsibilities extend across generations.

This understanding rests on recognizing that agential forces operate beyond the human. The drum, the paddle, the cedar shaving, the smudge smoke rising near the starting gate, these are not passive. They carry their own protocols, their own capacities to bless, to teach, to connect. Keith's students learn to tap the drum and touch their hearts because the drum has blessed them; they learn that the energy they bring to a wood shaving will travel into the sweat lodge fire and bless someone else. This is not metaphor. It is a relational ontology in which the boundaries between human and more-than-human, between classroom and community, between present action and future consequence are understood as mutually constitutive. For teacher education programs committed to challenging settler colonial hegemony, this demands a reimagining of the very terms through which curriculum is conceptualized. It is not enough to add Indigenous content to existing structures; the structures themselves (the temporal logics, the spatial arrangements, the assumptions about who and what has agency) must be reconceptualized.

Keith's classroom, then, is not a model to replicate but a provocation to challenge structures and imagine alternatives. It asks preservice teachers to consider what it means to teach from a position of humility rather than mastery, to understand knowledge as a living process rather than a commodity, and to recognize that education is always already embedded in relationships that precede and exceed education systems as we understand them. It asks teacher educators to consider how programs might cultivate the "alacritous flexibility" required to respond when settler colonialism reasserts itself, not only in classrooms but in curriculum

policies, licensure requirements, and the settler-colonial structures that shape what counts as legitimate knowledge. The more-than-human relationships at work in Siletz Valley Schools; the protocols of the drum, relationship with the cedar, the seven generations reaching backward and forward, are not incidental to the curriculum; they are the curriculum, understood as a set of living relationships that must be honored, protected, and continually renewed. If teacher education is to take the challenge of Indigenous futurities seriously, it must learn to see these forces not as cultural flourish but as pedagogical imperatives that reshape what it means to teach, to learn, and to be responsible, to sit with the sentiment shared by Keith to his students, but a lesson to us all; *they have so much education, but they don't have that piece you have. That's why you're unique.*

Chapter 8: Conclusion, A Call for Complexity

The cases discussed in the previous chapters are not intended to offer models to be imitated, nor a roadmap for the implementation of curricula focused on Indigenous lives and communities; they are not intended to offer a way to implement the lessons directly into classrooms with a different context; they are not intended to provide a strategy for teaching such things that will alleviate the pressures of settler-colonial hegemony. Instead, they are intended to be a series of provocations, glimpses into the messy, and often contradictory practices that emerge when Indigenous-centered curricular mandates collide with the lived realities of K-12 schooling.

Through the experiences of Kora, Samantha, Winter, and Keith, each positioned differently within this complicated educational ecosystem, we witness how Senate Bill 13: Tribal History/Shared History has been simultaneously embraced and undermined, honored and evaded, rendered performative in some spaces, and transformative in others. They help us see how settler colonialism is not a static structure passively awaiting teachers' acts of description and exposure, but instead a protean phenomenon that shifts, reorients, and reasserts itself in response to our efforts to destabilize its hegemony. In this way, these cases do not simply document the successes or failures of SB 13; instead, they invite us into a relation to this work that has the potential to be more generative, more profoundly unsettling in the best senses of that term.

To teach against the grain of settler colonialism is not as simple as working with preservice educators and teaching them to speak truth to power and then expect power to yield. While breaking silences and sharing harsh truths is essential, framing structural injustice as something that will break in the face of truth-telling is fanciful and quixotic.

Instead, my thesis is that unsettling settler colonialism requires more than knowing truth and sharing it with students. It requires a foundational shift in our understanding of what curriculum is, how it operates at a community level, and how it moves alongside both human and more-than-human relationships.

If we think of settler colonialism as a protean, shifting, and adapting phenomenon, rather than a static object, then the work of teaching against it demands something other than simply speaking truth. It requires more than teachers knowing the truth and sharing it with students; educators with this mindset may find their accurate histories and good intentions still absorbed and neutralized by the very structures they seek to unsettle, reduced to a checkbox. This is because curriculum cannot simply be understood as content; it is not simply a well-crafted lesson plan, and teaching is not just relegated to transmission of knowledge. Curriculum needs to be understood as a complex assemblage: it maneuvers through affective registers of a school, through the administrative silence that signal what will and will not be enforced, through the community histories that press against the walls of K-12 spaces, challenging the comfortable silences which those structures have grown accustomed to. It is the more-than-human relationships: the drum, the cedar, the sage, and the Seven Generations that refuse to be segregated and silenced within settler epistemologies.

To teach against structures that reassert settler colonialism is not to solve a problem but to enter an ongoing struggle; one that demands a fundamentally different orientation to what curriculum is and what teachers must be prepared to do.

The Masks of Settler-Colonial Agency:

Across these cases, settler-colonial agency manifested in seemingly distinct and disparate ways; however, they share an interconnected coherence, each revealing how hegemony sediments and normalizes itself through institutional structures, affective responses, and habituated silences. Kora's experience illuminates the affective dimensions of settler colonial agency: the squeamishness, discomfort, and anxiety that white educators feel when confronted with curricula that center Indigenous presence and challenge narratives of American exceptionalism, the myth of moral righteousness, and the presumption of neutrality in the history of education. This discomfort, left unexamined, becomes a barrier to transformative curricular implementation; this discomfort becomes a rationalization for avoidance, an avoidance that is justified and protected by institutional structures that treat SB 13 as optional rather than mandatory.

We see this in the professional development session that instead operated as a therapeutic space for processing white guilt, the school board chair who asserted "this isn't just a tribal school," and the apathy that reduces SB 13 to a checkbox rather than a transformative mandate. These are not isolated events but instead evidence of a complicated system of avoidance that protects settler comfort at the cost of Indigenous presence. What Kora's case makes particularly interesting is how resistance to Indigenous-centered curriculum rarely announces itself as hostility, and more often shrouds itself in discomfort and a desire to return to habituated silences.

Samantha's experience reveals a different dimension of settler colonial agency: the epistemological push for generic representation. Her story of the feather on the curriculum pamphlet; a generic pan-Indigenous symbol meant to represent the place-based and culturally specific curriculum of the Siletz people. This instance captures how settler

colonialism renders Indigenous identity legible only through familiar, comfortable iconography. This retreat into comfortable symbolism functions as an erasure that is potentially more insidious than outright exclusion, as it represents the appearance of inclusion while siphoning away Indigenous presence in its full specificity and complexity.

Samantha's case also exposes how settler colonial agency operates through the historization of Indigenous people. Her conversation with the third grader, who could not recognize/acknowledge her as a living Native person despite her being there that day in his classroom, showed how deeply this habit of consigning Indigenous people to a distant history is sedimented. Even within a school with a large Indigenous population, the idea of Indigenous peoples as historical artifacts persists. It operates to distance the violence of settler colonialism from contemporary accountability. When Samantha's students learn about termination through her mother's experience, when they calculate blood quantum math and recognize it as a tool of erasure, she is engaging in counter-practices that challenge this historical distancing.

Winter's case extends this analysis, and reveals how settler colonial agency operates through performative inclusion, reducing Indigenous identity and culture to its least disruptive elements and uncomplicating identity for the sake of easy visibility. The school willing to host "Rock Your Mocs" and hold it up as a moral victory is an example of a pattern of educators who are only amenable to romantic representations of Indigeneity, which obscures the violence of settler history. This echoes Samantha's story about the feather used as an icon on some SB13 curricular materials. The fact that this kind of preference for surface-level engagements over substantive conversations about

sovereignty and survivance is widespread is evidence that such desires exist at a more general level than individual attitudes.

This speaks to a deeper pattern of epistemic extraction that treats Indigenous knowledge as a resource to be consumed rather than a relationship to be honored. Her insistence that stories have protocols, that not all knowledge can be shared at all times, and that the spiritual dimensions of Indigenous practice must be respected, challenges the extractive logic that positions Indigenous knowledge as endlessly available for settler consumption.

Keith no doubt faces similar pressures. However, his stories describe a classroom grounded in relationality, humility, and cultural practice. His classroom, described as an "amoeba" that shifts and changes in response to students' interests, models a flexibility that settler colonial structures resist. His willingness to admit what he does not know, to learn alongside his students, and to bring in culture bearers rather than positioning himself as the sole authority challenges the hierarchy that settler colonialism inscribes in educational spaces. The protocols he teaches; standing for honor songs, when songs are for Indigenous people only, and how to approach the energy one brings to create works, these are not limitations but languages of respect that create sites of possibility for genuine engagement with Indigenous knowledges.

However, even Keith’s classroom exists in tension with the structures and systems that surround it. He must constantly resist the pressure to conform to settler colonialism's expectation of product, of urgency. He finds himself needing to justify his amoeba-like classroom to colleagues who may see it as lacking rigor. He struggles to navigate the contradictions of working within a school systems that simultaneously celebrates, but also

limits Indigenous presence. His case, like the others, is not a story of triumph over settler colonialism but over conflict with and in it.

The Protean Nature of Settler Colonialism and the Challenge of Counteragency:

What brings these cases together is the recognition that settler colonialism is not a problem that can be simply excised; instead, it operates as a force that must be continually resisted. When Kora attempts to implement SB 13 with integrity, she instead encounters administrative apathy, school board dismissiveness, and even wrestles with her own squeamishness; these are all forms of resistance that, while not outwardly hostile, effectively neutralize the goals of SB 13. When Samantha pushes for culturally specific representation, she encounters the undertow[21] of pan-Indigeneity, persistence of historical erasure, and the suspicions of colleagues who mistake cultural engagement as a lack of structure.

When Winter offers Indigenous knowledges that do not conform to romantic views of Indigenous life, she encounters habitual practices of avoidance: for example, the principal choosing to encourage "Rock Your Mocs" and showing trepidation when Winter instead suggests something more formative. These habits seek comfort by avoiding unsettling narratives, opting instead for performative representation of Indigeneity. When Keith creates space for relational, process-oriented learning, students understand the paddle is a relational piece of the learning process, and will contribute to the community in unforeseen ways. He must also constantly resist the pressure to conform to settler colonial expectations of how classrooms are intended to look and operate.

[21] "Undertow" in this context refers to the subtle, often unmarked pull of settler colonial ideologies that operate beneath the surface of policy and practice, working against even explicit commitments to Indigenous presence by reasserting settler norms, epistemologies, and expectthe ations.

The shifting nature of settler colonialism, the articulations of "squeamishness," the dismissive tones that reassert Indigenous identity and presence as optional conversations, and colleagues applying pressure when classrooms do not conform to an expected norm show that settler colonialism possesses a protean quality. The way that settler colonialism reorients to challenge different forms of knowing and being means that counteragency must be equally adaptive, always already in motion. The work of teaching against the grain of settler colonialism cannot be reduced to a set of strategies or techniques. It requires reorienting classrooms and our ideas of curriculum. It calls for a way of being in relationship to curriculum, community, and the more-than-human dynamics that are grounded in humility, responsiveness, and a willingness to shift our understanding of possibilities.

While Keith's classroom does its best to exemplify this orientation, it is not unique to him. Kora's willingness to sit with discomfort, to name her own whiteness, and model vulnerability for her students shares a similar desire to challenge settler-colonial hegemony, adapted to her own positionality. Samantha's refusal to justify her cultural pedagogy to colleagues who frame her work as lacking structure, and her reassertion of Indigenous knowledges' legitimacy and vitality, even in spaces not created or positioned to receive it, is counteragency in its own right. Winter's commitment to authenticity, her refusal to reduce Indigenous knowledge to its most legible elements, and her insistence on relationship over extraction also represent a complex agency that runs counter to the goals of settler colonialism, a form of refusal that is also an invitation to engage differently.

The Protean Nature of Counteragency:

The four case studies presented in this work each illuminate distinct yet interconnected forms of counteragency against settler colonialism. While the previous sections focused on how settler colonial agency manifests across different contexts, this section examines the sources of knowledge and support that enable these educators to engage in transformative work. What emerges is a pattern of counteragency that is itself protean; adapting, shifting, and responding with the same fluidity as the settler colonial forces it seeks to interrupt. This counteragency is not a matter of individual heroism or exceptionalism; it is fundamentally supported by embedded relations with the broader community, relations that provide the knowledge, authority, and resilience necessary to sustain this work over time. These relations are not incidental to the work but constitutive of it.

The counteragency demonstrated by these four educators is not a fixed set of strategies or a singular orientation but a dynamic, responsive practice that shifts in relation to context, challenge, and opportunity. Each educator enacts counteragency differently, yet their practices share a common feature: they refuse to be contained by the structures that would limit Indigenous presence to a contained, manageable, non-disruptive form. This refusal takes different shapes, each reflecting the educator's unique positionality, knowledge, and relationships, but together they reveal a pattern of adaptive resistance that matches the protean quality of settler colonialism itself. To teach against a force that shifts and reorients is to cultivate a practice that is equally fluid, equally responsive, equally unwilling to settle into fixed, predictable form.

Kora's counteragency operates through vulnerability and naming. As a white educator teaching in a school with a significant Indigenous population, Kora enacts counteragency by explicitly naming her own positionality, her discomfort, and her commitment to learning. Her practice of prefacing identity-centered work with a personal statement: "I'm white, that's not a secret. I'm gonna do my best here, and I'm gonna make mistakes," is not simply a pedagogical technique but a refusal to let silence function as a shield for inaction. By naming what others might leave unspoken, Kora disrupts the "elephant in the room" dynamic that often accompanies identity-centered curriculum, creating space for students to engage honestly with difficult material without the weight of unacknowledged tension pressing against every exchange. Her naming is not self-flagellation; it is an opening, a way of saying to her students, *I am here, I am imperfect, and I am willing to be taught.*

Kora's counteragency also operates through her willingness to be corrected, to sit with the "ickiness" of getting things wrong, and to model for her students the humility that genuine learning requires. When a student corrected her pronunciation of a name, Kora did not retreat into defensiveness or avoidance; she thanked the student, followed up after class, and used the moment to build rapport. This openness to correction, rooted in a recognition that she does not and cannot possess all knowledge, challenges the settler colonial assumption that the educator is the sole authority in the classroom. As Kora articulates, "If I don't call it out, who's going to? That's my responsibility." This is not the performance of humility but its practice: a willingness to be wrong, to be corrected, and to be changed by the encounter.

Kora's counteragency is also evident in her refusal to treat Indigenous curriculum as an add-on or an afterthought. Her use of *The Marrow Thieves* to deepen students' understanding of argumentation, climate change, and science demonstrates a commitment to weaving Indigenous topics through the fabric of the curriculum rather than isolating them in a silo. This refusal to segregate Indigenous content challenges the tendency to treat Indigenous knowledge as supplementary to the "real" curriculum. By integrating Indigenous literature and perspectives across subject areas, Kora models a curriculum that is not additive but transformative, one in which Indigenous presence is not supplemental to K-12 classrooms but foundational.

Samantha's counteragency operates through refusal and relationality. As an Indigenous educator and cultural practitioner, Samantha enacts counteragency by refusing to justify her pedagogy to colleagues who see it as lacking rigor and being unstructured. When her traditional games were dismissed as "kids just running around and screaming," she did not defend herself by appealing to the standards of settler colonial legibility. Instead, she drew a firm boundary: "I'm not going to justify anything that I'm doing with them...they're not my boss." This refusal to bend Indigenous pedagogy to colonial expectations is a form of insistence on the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge on its own terms, a knowledge that does not require validation from the structures that have historically sought its erasure. Her refusal is not defensiveness but sovereignty, a declaration that those who have never learned to see what she is doing will not dictate the terms of legitimacy.

Samantha's counteragency also operates through her relationship with stories, which she treats not as content to be delivered but as living beings that shape and are

shaped by their telling. Her refusal to reduce Indigenous knowledge to bullet points or sound bites, her insistence on the epistemological power of narrative, and her willingness to let stories "circle around" and land somewhere deeper than a direct answer. These practices resist the settler colonial impulse to render knowledge extractable, scalable, and controllable. As Garroute and Westcott (2013) argue, stories are living beings that resist overanalysis and appropriation; Samantha's pedagogy honors that vitality. She does not deliver stories as information; she enters into relationship with them, and she invites her students to do the same.

Yet Samantha's counteragency is not simply refusal; it is also relation. She builds connections with students that extend beyond the classroom, encouraging them to go home and talk to their grandparents, to bring back stories, to see themselves as part of a living tradition. Her teaching of Traditional Ecological Knowledge, language, and protocol creates a space where Indigenous knowledge is not a subject to be studied but a practice to be lived. When students gather hazel at the right time, peel it, and understand it as science, history, and culture all at once, they are engaging in a form of learning that cannot be contained by settler colonial siloing and imagined boundaries of how subject matter is intended to operate in classrooms. Her refusal in this context is not her isolating herself from her peers; it is instead reasserting Indigenous knowledge's significance and reimagining a new terrain for education.

Winter's counteragency operates through protection and presence. As a cultural practitioner and district-level educator, Winter enacts counteragency by protecting Indigenous knowledge from extraction while also making it present in spaces not designed to receive it. Her insistence that stories are not for mass production, that

protocols must be honored, and that the spiritual dimensions of Indigenous practice cannot be separated from the content are acts of refusal that push back against the commodification of Indigenous culture. When she asks, "How much do I really share?" she is not hoarding knowledge but protecting it from a system that has not shown itself capable of caring for it. Her protection is not scarcity but stewardship, a recognition that some things are sacred and serve a purpose based on timing and context.

Winter's counteragency is also evident in her critique of performative inclusion. When the principal celebrated "Rock Your Mocs" as a moral victory, Winter challenged him: "You don't have to do that every year...we don't always have to do the romanticized part of our culture." This refusal to let comfortable symbols stand in for substantive engagement is a form of counteragency that insists on the complexity of Indigenous identity; a complexity that cannot be reduced to pretty moccasins or mini powwows. By naming the entitlement that often accompanies requests for Indigenous guest speakers, and by pushing back against the preference for "romanticized" representations, Winter challenges the settler colonial tendency to consume Indigenous culture without relationship. Her critique is not a rejection of celebration but a demand that celebration be grounded in something deeper than extraction masquerading as appreciation.

Yet her counteragency is also relational. Her work is grounded in a commitment to the Siletz community, to the students and families she serves, and to the land that holds ancestral memory. When she speaks of singing to the land, of gathering camas in the same place her ancestors gathered, of the stories that ground us in place, she is articulating a form of knowledge that is not abstract but embodied, not extractable but relational. This is a form of counteragency that operates through presence, not the presence of symbols or

representations but the presence of living, ongoing relationship. Her presence is not performance but instead an undeniable presence to the ongoing life of a people and a place.

Keith's counteragency operates through flexibility and honor. As an Indigenous educator with multiple roles, cultural arts and language teacher, tribal liaison, bus driver, athletic director, Keith enacts counteragency through a refusal to let fear of his own incomplete knowledge justify non-engagement or not passing on the knowledge he does have. His willingness to teach what he has not mastered, to learn alongside his students, and to bring in culture bearers when appropriate models a form of humility that challenges the settler colonial expectation of mastery. As he articulates, "I don't think you have to master something to teach it; I need to know maybe twenty percent more than the kids, and as they catch up, I learn twenty percent more." His humility is not a lack of ambition but a different understanding of what it means to teach, an understanding rooted in the recognition that knowledge is a living process, not a possession to be acquired and then dispensed.

His counteragency also operates through his "amoeba-like" classroom, a space that shifts and changes in response to students' interests, cultural protocols, and the demands of Indigenous knowledge. This flexibility is not a lack of structure but a responsiveness to the living nature of the material. When students need to slow down, Keith gives them permission; when they need cultural grounding, he offers smudge or tobacco; when they want to pursue a particular project, he learns alongside them. This is a form of counteragency that refuses the urgency of settler colonial education, insisting instead on process, presence, and relationality. His classroom is not a machine for producing learning

outcomes but a living space where learning happens because relationships are honored and respected.

Keith's counteragency is also grounded in honoring the protocols that govern cultural knowledge, honoring the energy students bring to their work, honoring the ancestors and the generations yet to come. His teaching of the Seven Generations principle, his insistence that students carry themselves with respect, and his recognition that the energy they put into something as seemingly simple as a wood shaving may benefit the larger community, these practices embed students in a complex relationship of responsibility that extends far beyond the classroom. This is counteragency as intergenerational practice, a refusal to let education be reduced to individual achievement. His articulation of energy and respect are not abstractions but actionable practices, a daily reminder that every choice carries weight far beyond its immediate ramifications.

Community Connection as the Foundation of Counteragency:

Across all four case studies, counteragency is not an individual achievement but a collective practice sustained by embedded relations with the broader community. These relations take different forms (family connections, tribal citizenship, professional networks, and lived presence in the community), but they share a commonality: they provide the knowledge, authority, and resilience necessary to sustain transformative teaching over time. Without these relations, the counteragency described in these cases would be difficult to sustain; with them, it becomes a living practice that generates its own momentum. The educator who is connected within community is not alone in the struggle;

they are supported, corrected, sustained, and held accountable by the relationships that surround them.

Kora's counteragency is supported by her interconnectedness in the Siletz community. As a white educator who married into a long-standing Siletz (the community, not the tribe) family, Kora has connections that extend beyond the school walls. She attends community events, speaks with people, shops and lives locally, and through these actions has developed trust with her students and their families. As she articulates, "You shouldn't be working with populations of students whose culture you're not willing to do your best to absolutely learn...and recognize." This embeddedness is not incidental to her teaching; it is integral. Her willingness to learn more about hunting, baseball, and other aspects of community life reflects her deep care for her students; it is not learned from a book but through lived relationships.

Kora's relationships also provide her with access to colleagues like Samantha, who offer guidance, encouragement, and permission to get things wrong. Kora and Samantha's relationship is not simply collegial but deeply relational, grounded in mutual respect and a shared commitment to the community they serve. Samantha's pep talk, "it is going to be awkward, just get over it, get over yourself," is not advice delivered from a distance but support offered from within a relationship. This is a form of relational knowledge that cannot be transmitted through professional development; it must be cultivated through lived connections with and in a community.

Kora's relational understanding also makes her aware of the dangers of offloading responsibility. She is acutely aware of the tendency to lean on colleagues of color to do the work of cultural representation. Her decision to speak up when she sees others placing

undue burden on Samantha, her insistence that Samantha should not be the "one who always speaks up," and her recognition that this labor is often uncompensated and underappreciated; these are acts of allyship that only become possible when one is embedded enough to see the dynamics at play. Her connection is not a claim to belonging but a position from which she can see clearly enough to act.

Samantha's counteragency is supported by her multiple forms of community knowledge. As a citizen of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, a language and cultural educator, and someone whose family history includes the tribe's termination and restoration, Samantha brings to her work forms of knowledge that cannot be learned through professional development. Her ability to use her mother's experience of termination as a teaching example, to connect students to tribal elders, and to frame cultural practice as ongoing and living is grounded in her own immutable presence in the community. Her knowledge is not acquired but inherited, not learned but lived.

Her institutional position also supports her. As a licensed educator, she has a foothold in the school that is not easily dismissed. Her certification and role as the K-12 language and culture teacher give her institutional authority that, combined with her cultural knowledge, becomes a powerful source of counteragency. This is a form of "edgewalking" (Tupuola, 2004) (existing on the margin between two worlds and using that position to create bridges) that is only possible because Samantha is embedded in both the school and the community. Her position is not a compromise but a strategic location, a place from which she can speak to both worlds without being fully claimed by either.

Winter's counteragency is supported by her multiple tribal affiliations and her role as a cultural practitioner. As a citizen of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, Cherokee, Wasco, and Grande Ronde, Winter brings to her work a deep and complex relationship to Indigenous identity. Her knowledge of protocols, her understanding of the spiritual dimensions of cultural practice, and her commitment to protecting stories from extraction are grounded in forms of knowledge that are not available to outsiders. As a district-level educator who works with multiple schools, she has a broader view of the challenges and opportunities facing Indigenous education, while her interconnectedness in the Siletz community keeps her attuned to the specific needs of her people. Her counteragency is not the product of a single identity but of a complex interweaving of affiliations, each contributing its own strand to the whole.

Winter's counteragency is also supported by her relationships with students and families. When she tells stories to students, returns years later, and finds they remember and help teach them, she witnesses the power of relational pedagogy. These relationships, built over time and grounded in trust, enable her to do work that a guest speaker or a packaged curriculum could never accomplish. As she articulates, "I don't think they understand how rude they seem to me; I don't try to take offense because I need to partner with them so they can help my native families." This willingness to set aside personal offense for the sake of the community is only possible when one is deeply committed to that community.

Yet Winter's embeddedness also exposes her to the frustrations of being positioned as a representative of an entire community. The principal who celebrated "Rock Your Mocs" as a moral victory, the educators who see her as a resource to be extracted, the

expectations that she will make Indigenous presence visible on demand, these are forms of entitlement that only become visible when one is engaged enough to see the patterns at play. Winter's refusal to accept these forms of entitlement, her insistence on being treated as a person rather than a symbol, is a form of counteragency that is only possible because of the confidence that comes from community recognition. Her presence is not assimilation into the institution but a position from which she can name its failures without being consumed by them.

Keith's counteragency is supported by his deep ties to the Siletz community and his multiple roles within the school. As a citizen of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, a person whose family has lived in the area for generations, and an educator whose responsibilities span teaching, bus driving, athletic direction, and tribal liaison, Keith is entrenched in the community in ways that few educators can claim. His knowledge of tribal leaders, elders, and cultural practitioners, his understanding of the protocols that govern different forms of knowledge, and his ability to connect students to their family lineages are all grounded in ways that cannot be replicated by outsiders. His counteragency is not a set of strategies but an expression of who he is in relation to his people.

Keith's work is also supported by his pedagogical humility, which is itself a product of the community. His recognition that he does not know everything, his willingness to seek out elders and culture bearers, and his insistence on honoring protocols are not strategies to deploy but expressions of a relational orientation cultivated through community connection. As he articulates, "I get some information from a tribal leader, a tribal elder, or someone who has more knowledge than me in the area, because I

try, and I want to make sure I come from a place that gives them the best insight and direction I possibly can." His humility is not insecurity but a recognition that knowledge is distributed across the community, not concentrated in the individual.

Keith's connectedness extends beyond the school to the more-than-human world. His understanding of energy as relational, his teaching of the Seven Generations principle, and his insistence that students honor the resources they use are forms of knowledge only possible when one is a part of the community that practices them. The wood shavings that become fire starter for the sweat lodge, the canoe paddles that carry protocols and histories, the smudge that blesses and grounds; these are not abstract concepts but lived practices that Keith has learned through relationship with community and land. His embeddedness is not limited to human relationships; it extends outward to include the trees, the drum, the smoke, and the ancestors who taught him how to honor them all.

These practices show that counteragency against settler colonialism in education is not a matter of individual will or exceptional effort, but is fundamentally enabled by embedded relations with the broader community. These relations provide the knowledge, authority, and resilience necessary to sustain transformative teaching over time. They also inoculate against the tendency to reduce this work to a set of strategies or techniques, reminding us that counteragency is not a product to be delivered but a relationship to be lived. The educator who has ties to the community is not simply better prepared; they are differently oriented, grounded in a web of relations that shapes what they know, how they teach, and why they persist.

This has significant implications for teacher education. If counteragency is made possible by relations, then teacher education programs must move beyond the preparation

of individual teachers to an emphasis on relational networks. This means creating opportunities for preservice teachers to engage with communities over time, not as observers but as participants. It means valuing the knowledge that comes from community alongside the knowledge that comes from coursework. It requires recognizing that preparing transformative educators cannot be accomplished in isolation from the communities those educators will serve, and developing the skills and willingness to help educators become part of something larger than themselves. The work of building relationships cannot be compressed into a workshop or a module; it requires time, presence, and a willingness to be changed by the encounter.

These educators show that counteragency is possible and will change based on positionality and context, they also show that it is work that requires ongoing relationship and continuous learning. Their practices are not models to be replicated but invitations to enter into relational spaces that make such work possible. As teacher education programs seek to prepare educators for the challenges of teaching against the grain of settler colonialism, they need to attend not only to the knowledge and skills that preservice teachers need but also to the relations that will sustain them.

The counteragency that Kora, Samantha, Winter, and Keith embody is not simply an individual achievement; it is made possible through the work of the communities that have shaped and continue to shape them, the relations that support them, and the traditions that sustain them. Their work is an articulation of the power of relationality, respect, and responsibility as well as a reminder that the most profound challenges to settler colonialism are not individual acts of resistance but collective practices that connect educators, students, families, communities, and the more-than-human world in a web of

mutual responsibility and ongoing reciprocity. Preparing teachers for this work is not about giving them a set of tools; it is about inviting them into a way of being, one grounded in humility, sustained by relationship, and oriented toward the generations yet to come.

Implications for Teacher Education

These cases offer significant and meaningful lessons for teacher education programs seeking to prepare educators for the work of implementing Indigenous-centered curriculum. Perhaps one of the most important of these is that content knowledge alone is insufficient. Teachers need to know the history, the complexities of sovereignty, and the nuances of contemporary Indigenous presence, but they also need to be prepared for the affective, relational, and political aspects of this work. They need to understand that settler colonialism does not dissipate upon meeting pushback; it reorients and reasserts itself, and therefore must be continuously resisted.

This suggests several specific shifts in how teacher education programs are conceptualized and designed.

First, teacher education must seek to cultivate educators' capacity and willingness to sit with discomfort. The squeamishness and anxiety Kora describes, the fear of "getting it wrong" that leads many non-Indigenous educators to avoid Indigenous-centered curriculum must be addressed not as a personal failing or shortcoming, but rather as a condition of the structures in which teacher education currently resides, breaking silences requires shifting these spaces from teaching towards whiteness to instead working with pre-service educators to interrogate those anxieties limit their comfort and handling topics

which were absent from their own education, explore their affective responses to difficult histories and develop strategies for navigating discomfort without retreating into silence.

Second, teacher education must foreground relationality over technique. The strategies that Kora, Samantha, Winter, and Keith employ; bringing in guest speakers, teaching protocol, creating space for student vulnerability, connecting classroom practice to community, are not simply techniques to be replicated but exemplars of a relational practice to be engaged with by educators who need to develop connections to communities and consider their own contexts in relationship to those communities. This requires teacher education programs to create and model relationality themselves: to challenge themselves to connect with communities, to create opportunities for sustained engagement with Indigenous cultural practitioners, and to recognize that relationship building cannot be relegated or reduced to a workshop or module. As Kora's experience shows, her success is not merely a function of her personal qualities but emerges from her embeddedness in the Siletz community.

Third, teacher education needs to prepare teachers to understand curriculum as a complex assemblage. The lesson plans, state standards, and curriculum materials that are the typical focus of teacher education are only a small part of what curriculum actually is. As these cases demonstrate, curriculum is also community affect, administrative anxiety, school board politics, historical trauma, and more-than-human relations. Preparing educators to implement Indigenous-centered curriculum requires preparing them to engage with the whole of this dynamic: to recognize when silence is operating as a form of erasure, to anticipate the forms of resistance they may encounter, and to build the relationships that can sustain them when settler colonialism reasserts itself.

Fourth, teacher education must orient students and help them develop alacritous flexibility. The protean nature of settler colonialism requires challenges from a counteragency that is equally adaptable. Keith's "amoeba" classroom, which shifts in response to student interest and cultural protocol, models the necessary flexibility, not as an absence of structure but instead as a responsiveness to the living nature of Indigenous knowledge. Preservice teachers need practice in this kind of flexible responsiveness: in making pedagogical decisions in the moment, in responding to student questions without having all of the answers, and modeling that humility, this is not a call for a generation of educators to believe themselves to be above critique, but to instead develop a critical reflexiveness that is able to read if that critique is genuine or an action to silence. Preservice educators need opportunities to see curriculum unfold in ways that cannot be fully scripted in advance.

Fifth, teacher education needs to challenge the systems in place that have created educational structures and systems that enable avoidance. The fact that many teachers treat SB 13 as optional reflects a shortcoming not just of individuals, but the systems that support them. Teacher education programs must help preservice teachers understand how institutional structures, under-resourced professional development, curricular materials that are uneven in quality, and enforcement mechanisms that are weak or nonexistent, enable avoidance and, by extension, erasure. They must also prepare teachers to advocate for structural change, to push back against administrative apathy, and to build the collective support that can sustain counterhegemonic teaching.

Toward a Broader Vision of Curriculum and Teacher Preparation

In closing, the cases presented point toward a broader reconceptualization of curriculum and teacher preparation. One that takes seriously the insight that settler colonialism is not simply a set of ideas that can be countered with better information but an agential force that is constantly shifting, adapting, and reasserting itself. To prepare teachers for this work is to prepare them for a struggle that is never finished; instead, they must represent a resistance to them that is always already in motion.

This reconceptualization has implications beyond Indigenous education. The relational, place-based, and more-than-human orientation that emerges from these cases offers a model for engaging with other forms of systemic oppression and for reimagining education more broadly. What would it mean to approach all curriculum as relational, to understand all learning as embedded in community, to recognize that knowledge is not a commodity but a living process? These questions, which emerge from Indigenous traditions, have relevance for all educators seeking to challenge the logics of extraction, hierarchy, and control that pervade contemporary schooling.

The counteragency that Kora, Samantha, Winter, and Keith embody is not a rejection of structure but a refusal to let structure become a mechanism of containment. It is an insistence that education can be something other than what it has been, that schools can be sites of relationship rather than reproduction, and that Indigenous futurities, grounded in relationality, responsibility, and presence, can find purchase even in spaces not designed to receive them. This is not a naive optimism but a hard-won hope, born of struggle, sustained by community, and passed on through stories.

Final Reflections:

As I reflect on the interviews, observations, and analysis that have shaped this work, I am struck by the generosity of the participants who shared their stories, their struggles, and their hopes. Kora, Samantha, Winter, and Keith each, in their own way, are doing the work of refusing settler colonialism, not through grand gestures but through the million small choices that constitute a life lived in relationship to community, culture, and the more-than-human world. Their work is often underappreciated, undercompensated, and underacknowledged, yet it continues.

What I have learned from them, and what I hope this writing conveys, is that teaching against the grain of settler colonialism is not a project of individual heroism, nor a missionary fantasy, but a collective practice of relational responsibility. It requires not just knowledge and skill but vulnerability and humility; not just policy and mandate but relationship and trust; not just resistance and refusal but presence and persistence. It is work that is never finished, never fully successful, never beyond the reach of co-optation or domestication, but it is also work that generates its own momentum, creates its own possibilities, and opens futurities that cannot be fully anticipated or contained.

For teacher education programs, this means embracing a vision of teacher preparation that is as complex, fluid, and responsive as the curriculum it seeks to enact. It means recognizing that the knowledge teachers need cannot be packaged in a course or a module but must be cultivated over time, through relationship, and in community. It means preparing teachers not to implement a curriculum but to engage a living field of relationships with students, with communities, with the land, with ancestors, and with the generations yet to come.

As the Seven Generations principle teaches, the decisions we make today will be felt by those who come after us. If we are to create educational spaces where Indigenous truths, lives, and futurities can not only be acknowledged but thrive, we must be willing to engage the whole of the complex assemblage that is curriculum, not to master it or control it, but to enter it with humility, a willingness to be changed by it, and to pass on to the next generation a practice of teaching that is not about knowing but about relating, not about claiming but about honoring, not about arriving but about continuing.

This is the work that Kora, Samantha, Winter, and Keith are doing. Teacher education programs must learn to support it. And it is the work that I, as a Siletz scholar and educator, am committed to continuing, not as an achievement to be completed but as a relationship to be sustained, a story to be told, and a future to be imagined into being.

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