

Article

Visioning Indigenous Futures: Centering Sovereignty and Relationality in Belonging

Denise Bill ¹, Robin Zape-tah-hol-ah Minthorn ^{2,*} and Michelle Montgomery ³¹ Adult and Higher Education Program, Muckleshoot Tribal College, Auburn, WA 98092, USA² School of Education, Associate Professor, University of Washington Tacoma, Tacoma, WA 98402, USA³ School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, Associate Professor, University of Washington Tacoma, Tacoma, WA 98402, USA

* Correspondence: robstarr@uw.edu

Abstract: In this article, we share how a Tribal–University partnership fosters and centers sovereignty and relationality in creating a Tribally based doctoral cohort. This is the first tribal–university partnership that offers a doctoral program on tribal lands. We have embedded a collective approach to support Indigenous students since its inception. We have approached belonging through an Indigenous way of being. This has included building relationality in how we offer opening and closing each quarter for students to share their tribal communities' ways. We have built in connections through offering monthly writing time with an Indigenous scholar to support their development, growth, and contributions. During their second year, we built into their community-grounded praxis an opportunity to honor Indigenous knowledges where they earned an Indigenous Knowledge and Community Grounded Certificate. As we move into their last year of their doctoral program, we center belongingness in how we support them through their dissertation process through a co-chair model of Indigenous faculty supporting and integrating opportunities to connect holistically. This storying is a model of how to build authentic partnerships that center place and belonging in intentional ways.



Citation: Bill, D.; Minthorn, R.Z.-t.-h.-a.; Montgomery, M. Visioning Indigenous Futures: Centering Sovereignty and Relationality in Belonging. *Educ. Sci.* **2022**, *12*, 678. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12100678>

Academic Editor: Andras Balogh

Received: 9 August 2022

Accepted: 21 September 2022

Published: 5 October 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Keywords: Indigenous students; Indigenous belonging; Indigenous graduate students

1. Introduction

Before we share our story about belonging for this Muckleshoot doctoral cohort, we would like to acknowledge that the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe historically lived throughout the Green, Cedar, White, and Black River Watersheds. The Muckleshoot Indian Tribe are the signers of both the Medicine Creek Treaty and the Point Elliott Treaty. The Muckleshoot Language is xʷəłšucid. We acknowledge that all three co-authors live in the Pacific Muckleshoot on Coast Salish lands and are responsible to the tribal people whose ancestral lands are connected here and to the Urban Native communities that have evolved over time due to federal Indian policy. (We acknowledge that throughout this manuscript we are interchangeably using Indian, Native, American Indian, Native American, and Indigenous to reference to the Indigenous peoples within the United States. There is not one term that is used synonymously and is dependent on the context of use.) Specifically, Dr. Denise Bill acknowledges that she has lived in and grown up in the traditional lands of the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, bəqəłšulabš. Dr. Denise Bill comes from the villages of Stuck, Burns Creek, Herring House, Crossing Over Place, and Katilbc at the south end of Lake Washington. Dr. Denise Bill's life work is located on the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation, at Muckleshoot Tribal College. Dr. Robin Zape-tah-hol-ah Minthorn is a citizen of the Kiowa tribe and descendant of the Apache, Umatilla (and Cayuse), Nez Perce, and Assiniboine Nations. Both the Umatilla (and Cayuse) and Nez Perce have ancestral ties to what is now Washington state. She currently resides and her heartwork is situated on spuyaləpabš ancestral and reservation lands at the University of Washington Tacoma [1].

Dr. Michelle Montgomery is an enrolled Haliwa Saponi and descendant of Eastern Band Cherokee, whose heartwork is throughout multiple ancestral homelands of Indigenous communities. “Heart work is the work that we, Indigenous scholars, do on behalf and with our communities not expecting or wanting any payback or rewards. It is selfless and passionate to help benefit those whom we hold close to our hearts.” [2]. We acknowledge our connections to place and that our responsibility as Indigenous scholars and educators is to the land and tribal peoples who are connected to the lands where we live and work and where our heartwork reaches.

2. Creation Story for Muckleshoot Doctoral Cohort and Partnership

As we share the connections to belonging for the Muckleshoot doctoral cohort, we want to acknowledge the connections to the University of Washington Tacoma over time and that is a part of the creation story of this Muckleshoot doctoral cohort partnership coming into being.

Muckleshoot Tribal members have had various roles with the University of Washington Tacoma over the past sixty years. Dr. Willard Bill, Sr. was the first Muckleshoot Tribal member to earn his doctorate at University of Washington Seattle, in 1978. Virginia Cross is a long-time Muckleshoot Tribal Council member, served as Chairperson for much of her tenure, and earned her Master’s Degree at the University of Washington Seattle in 1978. Circa 2012, Muckleshoot Tribal College, UWB (University of Washington Tacoma Bothell), UWS (University of Washington Tacoma Seattle), and UWT (University of Washington Tacoma) actively worked on developing a University of Washington Masters in Business Administration to be held at Muckleshoot Tribal College (MTC). At the time, this did not happen, but it laid the foundation for future work. In 2018, University of Washington Tacoma Bothell offered a Business Operation and Management Certificate, and in 2018, offered a Project Management Certificate. Both Certificate Programs were spearheaded by Dr. Deanna Kennedy, Native professor from UW Bothell. It is of cultural value to acknowledge the efforts of Native educators from the past, laying the foundation for work we are doing today.

In September 2020, a Muckleshoot Tribal College staff member, Amy Maharaj reached out to newly appointed Director of Educational Leadership Doctoral (EdD) Program, Robin Minthorn, to request more information on the graduate programs offered at the University of Washington Tacoma School of Education. Robin Minthorn offered to go out to Muckleshoot to meet with Amy and Dr. Denise Bill. This first meeting became the meeting and interaction of many (there were 18 meetings between MTC and UWT SOE (and other offices)) over the course of six months. The interest in bringing graduate programs to MTC would end up focusing on the EdD Program as a way of solidifying the Tribal–University partnership. Ashley Walker and Dr. Michelle Montgomery are an integral part of the formation of this partnership and collaboration. A Memorandum of Agreement was signed in February 2020, and recruitment and admissions processes would take place over the next few months. The first Muckleshoot Doctoral cohort would include a group of fourteen women of whom most are Indigenous and all work within a context of supporting Tribal communities or Indigenous populations. The uniqueness of this cohort is that it is tribally based and, if not for the pandemic, all classes would be held on the Muckleshoot Tribal lands [3].

3. Genealogical Connections

Genealogical connections is used in lieu of literature review. From an Indigenous perspective we recognize that it is us tying our storywork back to the Indigenous scholars that have written about this topic before us. We tie in those connections into this written space.

There is scholarship that currently exists that highlights Native student visibility and Indigenous graduate student experiences. We have reframed it here as genealogical connections. We want to acknowledge some of the scholars who have discussed literature

that is connected and tied to what we share in this article. A part of this is in building genealogical connections from their heartwork to ours.

3.1. Visibility and Centering Narratives of Native Students in Higher Education

The visibility of narratives of Native students in higher education has grown over the last 20 years and continues to evolve. This includes the number of Native students in higher education overall attending college. Because of this, Fox et al. created the book on serving Native students [4]. If we want Native students to pursue higher education, we have to know how to serve them. They address important issues around Native American identity, American Indian epistemologies, and working with Native American parents, faculty, and staff. Brayboy et al. expanded on this book by re-situating and educating individuals in higher education about the unique status and state of Native American students being nation builders and their inherent right to self-determination [5]. Beyond the Asterisk, brings a deeper understanding of complex needs, programs, and areas to expand our knowledge that currently exists for Native students [6]. Meanwhile, there have been overviews of Indigenous students in higher education from a research study [7] and a praxis- and scholar-informed perspective [8]. Both of the aforementioned publications share challenges and lived realities that Native students face and suggest supporting and connecting with Native students during their pursuit of higher education and as they graduate and transition back into their communities.

To further this conversation on visibility in centering narratives of Native students in higher education, we highlight more genealogical connections. Montgomery shared her research on mixed-raced American Indian students in the southwest and their lived experiences [9]. This is important as we understand the rich and dynamic ways Native students navigate systems and living in their Tribal/Native communities. In connection to this, Lopez and Marley shared their research and recommendations on federal datasets and how Native students are represented in them overall and the needs to incorporate culturally relevant constructs and recommendations for future studies [10]. Lastly, we want to highlight how Reyes and Shotton tied all of this together with their report on visibility and implications for research, policy, and practice with Indigenous students [11]. This report also incorporates perspectives of Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians as well as factors that hinder or contribute to their success. The literature and scholarship have grown from visibilization to centering Indigenous narratives in ways that honor Native student voices and experiences around Nationhood and their lived experiences.

3.2. Indigenous Graduate Student Experiences in Higher Education

The scholarship on Indigenous graduate student experiences in higher education is growing and evolving. Brayboy, Castagno, and Solyom began the narrative of how to be intentional in offering graduate programs that center on tribal nation building and create institutional orientations of nation building [12]. Brayboy and Huaman continued contributing to scholarship on Indigenous graduate students through sharing their approaches in cultivating a Pueblo Doctoral Cohort [13]. They reframed and re-envisioned offering doctoral studies through the lens of nation building. Keen, Tachine, and Nelson shared their experiences through a qualitative study of how they documented their dissertation writing and doctoral experiences via social media [14]. This includes offering an Indigenous narrative directly from Indigenous doctoral students' voices. Nelson later built on this through her publication in navigating her doctoral process through her personal stories and using relationality as a lens and methodology [15]. She shares the process she enveloped in her own development as an Indigenous scholar by incorporating three dimensions: authenticity, vulnerability, and intentionality. Shotton focused her research on sharing Indigenous women experiences in their doctoral education journeys [16,17]. She shared how they have experienced racial microaggressions and yet were also centering reciprocity in their doctoral experiences and motivation to pursue a doctoral degree.

Alejandro, Fong, and De La Rosa evolved the literature through sharing the narratives of three cis Indigenous male graduate and professional students and how they conceptualized Indigenous belongingness [18]. Minthorn shared from an Indigenous faculty perspective how Indigenizing the doctoral experience contributed to building community leaders in educational leadership through the centering of Indigenous/Tribal narratives and strengths in an Indigenous doctoral cohort [19]. In connection to this, but with a different Indigenous doctoral cohort, Minthorn, Montgomery, and Bill shared their experiences and observations of Indigenous doctoral students reclaiming emotions in their classroom spaces and in building community with each other. This reclamation was accomplished through centering Indigenous narratives, honoring culture and community, and situating place and space that honors tribal sovereignty-created healing spaces.

Overall, the visibility of Indigenous students in higher education is growing as is the literature of Indigenous graduate students in higher education. We further contribute to its growth in providing our storywork of centering Indigenous cultures, values, and approaches to cultivate Indigenous belongingness for Indigenous doctoral students.

4. Storywork

In this article, first we shared the Creation Story for how this partnership began and used this in storying the past and integrating current narratives of how this Tribal and University partnership unfolded. We also connect our heartwork to Indigenous scholars and literature through a genealogical connections section that focuses on Indigenous visibility and Indigenous graduate students' experiences. Next, we will share our individual stories and connections to belonging in cultivating and expanding the Muckleshoot partnerships between the University of Washington Tacoma and the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe. After this, we share how we are centering and honoring *bəqəlšul* (Muckleshoot) sovereignty and relationality in belonging. This storywork is essential as we think of how we are weaving in the cultural teachings from Muckleshoot Elders that Dr. Denise Bill talks about and how the cultural beliefs and values of the Muckleshoot have been incorporated throughout the cultivation of space and a sense of belonging for the Muckleshoot Doctoral cohort.

Indigenous Storywork

Indigenous storywork is articulated by Archibald as a way of weaving our teachings and cultural beliefs through stories that are translated through oral and written ways [20]. She reminds us that we have the power to use our stories from our Tribes, Elders, and communities in connection to educational journeys. Indigenous Storywork includes seven principles that provide a foundation for how to utilize and integrate stories in our heartwork. These principles are: respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, inter-relatedness, and synergy. She shares the process and power of becoming storytellers and the power that stories have in communities and between people. Indigenous storywork provides space in academic and western spaces and verifies their need and use in the places we navigate. We share our stories as Indigenous women who have become a part of the Creation Story of this tribal partnership between University of Washington Tacoma and the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe. Our hope is that in sharing our own narratives and connection to this living partnership and to what has been created, we can create a sense of belonging with this tribally based doctoral cohort that we can teach others how to create belongingness situated and rooted in community.

5. Belongingness for Indigenous Faculty/Leaders

As a collective of Indigenous women scholars and educators, we acknowledge that the space that has been created with this Muckleshoot Doctoral cohort has created a space that was not there for us when we were navigating our doctoral degrees and we share below how this has impacted our own sense of belonging and observations as we move through supporting the first tribally based doctoral cohort on tribal lands in the United States.

5.1. Denise

As a Native American woman working in education for over thirty years in various roles such as elementary school teacher, vice-principal, superintendent, Native Education Coordinator, and professor, it really has led me to the position I hold currently at Muckleshoot Tribal College. Drawing on my experiences in working with Native students, Native families, Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, and various tribes, it has enabled me to know how to work in formal educational systems as well as Tribal systems.

My father taught me to stay connected to the students as this will keep me grounded. Another factor that shaped my thinking is the strong familial relationship. My family has strong ties to the University of Washington Tacoma over the past fifty years. My father, Dr. Willard Bill, Sr., was the first Muckleshoot Tribal member to earn a Doctoral Degree from University of Washington and to work as a professor there. My Mother, MaryAnn Bill, worked in Human Resources for over twenty years at the University of Washington.

As a Native woman in education, I take my lead from my family, tribe, and the important elders (Gilbert King George, Virginia Cross), and teachers in my life (Dr. Michelle Montgomery). The timing, based on the history I just described, was right for another partnership to be formed.

5.2. Robin

When I started my new role at UWT, I had transitioned from the University of New Mexico and had created an Indigenous doctoral cohort program that centered New Mexico tribal community voices in its creation. I was grateful to have been a facilitator of that and to have met so many Native doctoral students in the Southwest. Arriving in Washington and being the director of the EdD program, my plan was to wait a year to learn about the community and observe what was going on in Washington state (even though I was born in Oregon and some of my ancestors, tribes, and family are situated here). A month into my position, a Muckleshoot Tribal employee, Amy Maharaj, reached out to me. We started to meet at Muckleshoot Tribal College a few weeks later with Dr. Denise Bill. I never could have imagined what would unfold with this tribally based doctoral cohort moving so quickly and with the high interest we would have after starting to share it. I am grateful for this opportunity to build relations with strong Indigenous women like Dr. Bill and Dr. Montgomery who always have the best interest of the Muckleshoot tribe and Washington tribal communities in mind. I appreciate the embedded consciousness of acknowledging those who have come before us to build relationships and connections within the University of Washington system and that we are continuing that legacy now.

5.3. Michelle

The success of the Muckleshoot Doctoral Cohort Tribe is an example of a transparent and trustworthy collaboration guided by a tribal community member, Indigenous scholar, leader and mentor, Dr. Denise Bill. It has been both a rewarding and healing opportunity to work alongside Dr. Robin Minthorn, and Dr. Denise Bill to proactively advance Indigenous Knowledge systems. Through Dr. Minthorn's tenacity and leadership at the University of Washington Tacoma, School of Education, the cohort's curriculum focus has set in motion a dedicated, strong alignment for culturally responsive graduate education, and mentoring, while simultaneously honoring diverse, place-based knowledge, identities, and inclusive experiential learning opportunities.

6. Bəqəlšul (Muckleshoot) Sovereignty and Relationality in Belonging

Earlier, we shared the connections in land and federal policy that bəqəlšul has in sovereignty as a tribal nation and to the area. In this section, we will share ways that have centered bəqəlšul ways of creating a sense of belonging within the cohort and partnership over the last three years. We also want to share that one of the important pieces of all of this was the communication within each of the subsections shared below that cultivated a sense of belonging. There is always room to grow, and we are continuing this partnership

with a second Muckleshoot Doctoral cohort to start in summer 2023. We acknowledge and share this story that continues to grow and develop in ways that honor the sovereignty of the bəqəlšut.

6.1. Bəqəlšut Logo

When the Muckleshoot Doctoral cohort began in the first academic year 2020–2021 we also applied for a SEED grant through University of Washington Tacoma to help cover some of the costs to Indigenize and center Indigenous/Tribal knowledges, including the representation of this Tribal and University partnership. Once we secured the grant, we were able to send out a call for Muckleshoot Tribal and community members to send in logo designs. After we received these the Muckleshoot Doctoral cohort students voted on the logo; and this was what was chosen (see Figure 1). The artist is Samuel Obrovac, a Muckleshoot Tribal member, and we are now able to incorporate his artwork in our flyers and in spaces that would not have always had tribal representation. We uplift this artwork as part of the storywork in centering tribal knowledge and ways of being. This is also an assertion of sovereignty in centering the tribal art practices as a reflection of the partnership of a tribal nation to a university system. It is rare that there is this type of deep symbolism of representation in Tribal and University partnerships.



Figure 1. Bəqəlšut Logo created by Samuel Obrovac.

6.2. Bəqəlšut (Muckleshoot) Partnership Education Committee

A part of the accountability and honoring tribal community voice and sovereignty as part of our Muckleshoot Tribal and university partnership is creating a Muckleshoot Partnership Education Committee. The intention of this committee was to bring together Muckleshoot Tribal leaders, education employees, and University of Washington Native faculty and partner-connected staff together on a quarterly basis. We have been able to meet since spring 2020 on a quarterly basis to provide updates on the partnership and to receive input and feedback. The importance of this is that there is equal representation from both the Muckleshoot and the UW on this committee and, if not for the COVID-19 pandemic, we would be meeting in person and alternating locations between Muckleshoot and the UWT. Honoring sovereignty and place were at the center of this process by having the tribal partners choose who is represented on this committee from their tribal community and that we create reciprocal opportunities to connect with place for future meeting locations. Evidence of our responses to the feedback is that there was a conversation about a teaching institute that the Muckleshoot Tribal College and Adult and Higher Education were able

to re-establish in summer 2021, which has now had their second Muckleshoot Effective Teaching Institute. The UWT School of Education was able to sponsor registration fees and offer all of their EdD students in both the on-campus and Muckleshoot Doctoral cohorts attendance in this hybrid conference to learn and engage with Muckleshoot Tribal knowledge and learning opportunities.

6.3. Collective Approaches to Supporting Bəqəlšul (Muckleshoot) Students

We have embedded a collective approach to support Indigenous and doctoral students since the inception of this program. This includes a collective approach in how we support students, including having a team of people including two Native faculty—Dr. Robin Zape-tah-hol-ah Minthorn and Dr. Michelle Montgomery, EdD academic advisor—Ashley Walker, Muckleshoot Adult and Higher Education Executive Director—Dr. Denise Bill, and other Muckleshoot Tribal College employees. We have met on a quarterly or more basis to see how the cohort is doing and if there is anything we need to modify or add as a layer of support. We have been grateful to recently have Madrienne White join us, who is the Muckleshoot Tribal College Administrator and is tribally enrolled as part of this collective; we will continue this as an essential praxis. The intentionality of connection to each other across our Tribal and University partnership to find ways to grow how we support students in intentional ways as a collective pushes against the siloing that is often found in academia. In this way, our collective approach for this Muckleshoot Doctoral cohort honors tribal sovereignty through building relationality as a foundation of our partnership. In this section, we expand on ways that this collective approach developed ways of Indigenizing the cohort and incorporated feedback from community and students.

6.4. Opening the Cohort Journey and Quarters in a Tribally Appropriate Way

We have approached belonging through an Indigenous way of being, including beginning the Muckleshoot Doctoral cohort journey through an opening with a Muckleshoot prayer and canoe journey song. We acknowledge Willard Bill, Jr., the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe Cultural Director, who offered this song. In response to feedback from students' experiences and through our collective conversations, we embedded building relationality in how we offer opening and closing each quarter for students to share their tribal community and Elders' prayers and songs. We offered an opportunity for students to invite someone from their tribal community to share a song or prayer at the beginning and end of the cohort. This provides an opportunity for the students to build connections with each other culturally as well as an understanding of other tribal ways of being within the cohort. Since we started the doctoral cohort during the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to be innovative and creative in how we connected with the students in a tribally centered and intentional ways. Honoring sovereignty as a praxis is about honoring the student's own nationhood to determine who would represent them and their tribal identity or connections. We lived this out in our opening through the cultivation of place and connection to the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe.

6.5. Indigenous Centered Writing Connections

In continuing to cultivate ways for us to be responsive to the Muckleshoot Doctoral students' needs, we also were able to receive a \$10,000 award through the UWT Office of Community Partnership Faculty Fellows program. The title of our project was "Strengthening Tribally Based Partnerships through Indigenous Based Approaches to Community Building". A part of this was how we built connections and belonging through offering monthly writing time over the course of a year with an Indigenous scholar to support their writing development, growth, and contributions. We partnered with Anahuy Mentoring, LLC, and with Dr. Michelle Jacob, a Yakama scholar, who provided intentional writing and mentoring from an Indigenous and tribally centered approach [21]. This was an opportunity for Muckleshoot Doctoral students to share time virtually to work on their own Indigenous writing voice and to develop work from classes or in other forms they

would like. This was essential in how we identify ways to honor Indigenous and tribal perspectives in writing and scholarship.

6.6. Access to Technology and Internet

When the UWT School of Education was in the process of solidifying the Memorandum of Agreement with the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, we were in conversations with the then-Vice Chancellor of Equity and Inclusion who inquired how his office could support the Muckleshoot Doctoral cohort. As the pandemic began to surface in late winter and early spring 2020, it was apparent that we were entering into the COVID-19 pandemic and needed to prepare to have online classes, not knowing the future state of the impact of the virus on tribal communities. As such, Robin Minthorn worked with Dr. James McShay, Vice Chancellor of Equity and Inclusion, and Patrick Pow, Vice Chancellor for Information Technology, to receive quotes for laptops and hotspots; Dr. McShay found funding through a BEST grant/Puyallup Tribe grant to purchase the laptops needed and to pay for hotspots for one academic year. The hotspots were renewed for the following academic year due to the impact of the evolving variants of the COVID-19 virus. Because our Muckleshoot Doctoral cohort classes remained online and virtual for these two academic years, we understood the need to provide access to technology and the internet, especially because many of the doctoral students were living in tribal communities where internet service may not be stable and/or the hotspot could boost their access.

6.7. Indigenous Knowledge and Community-Centered Certificate

Toward the beginning of this Tribal and University partnership we began to have conversations and brainstorming on how to provide a way to honor the uniqueness and Indigenous focus of the Muckleshoot Doctoral Cohort, even meeting with each other and other faculty on UW Seattle campuses. We found out there was an option through the UWT Professional Development office to create an embedded certificate that could be linked to courses the students would already be taking and added on to the class expectations by adding a 40-h additional required connection. (Note: students in the doctoral program have to complete 300 h of leadership development/project growth work over the course of four quarters). This became the Indigenous Knowledge and Community-Centered Engagement certificate which was connected to the TEDLD 602 classes the students would take over the course of four quarters. This is a 40-h component in addition to the standard work in TEDLD 602, where each student provides an oral knowledge connection to their community-grounded praxis project and demonstrates how this oral knowledge connects intergenerational knowledge generation and tribal community preservation. We want to acknowledge the culturally groundedness and protocols that are centered and situated as a part of the creation of this certificate. This is a part of the sovereignty recognition at UWT. Having this certificate is honoring Tribal and Indigenous sovereignty in the methods and methodology in its creation and approval. Some of the oral knowledge concepts and projects that were completed from summer 2021 to spring 2022 were: a “No Fractions Here” Indigenous/Native-focused book club, intergenerational stories of educational experiences, familial interviews and connections, re-centering and honoring Black and Indigenous connections in a family’s history, working with tribal leaders and educators to plan an education major at a tribal college, planning a tribal leaders conference, creating a family recipe book, working with an education to employment project, and centering beading as ceremony. All of these oral knowledge sharing projects were reflected on personally by each student, shared for feedback by the cohort, and then shared at the end of the spring quarter in a report.

6.8. Co-Chairing Dissertations as a Collective Approach for Supporting Indigenous Doctoral Cohort Students

As we move into their last year of their doctoral program, we will center belonging in how we support the Muckleshoot Doctoral students through their dissertation process in a

co-chair model of Indigenous faculty supporting them and also integrating opportunities for them to connect holistically as they navigate this last process in their doctoral educational journey. The process to get to this point was to talk with the students to share options they would have for moving forward in their dissertation in practice and having them vote and have an opportunity to give their preferences. We were able to move forward with this co-chair model after receiving feedback and consensus from the Muckleshoot cohort members. The process for Dr. Robin Minthorn and Dr. Michelle Montgomery is to support the students as co-chairs, which includes working with them to give collective feedback on dissertation in practice drafts, IRB applications, and working with them to develop their dissertation in practice research. The beautiful part of this is the collective approach we are taking as co-chairs and the third committee members who have been selected who have mostly been tribal community members or those deeply connected to their dissertation in practice topics.

6.9. Indigenous Leadership in Education and Community Contexts

In 2020, as we developed this tribal/university partnership we understood the need not only for a certificate that honored the Indigenous-focus and -based cohort doctoral program that was being cultivated but also the need for an Indigenous-focused doctoral course to be created. During this academic year, we began to develop this course whose foundation was taken from a previously developed class by Minthorn. This course was then expanded on to fulfill the needs of the UWT EdD program and the Muckleshoot Doctoral cohort. It was also pivotal and important to highlight that Dr. Denise Bill, who is from the Muckleshoot Indian tribe, was the faculty for this course. Centering her and her tribal people's knowledge is an act of sovereignty and she deepened the tribal relationality in what is shared from this summer course.

In preparing for this course, it was important to center this work on Native lands of the Muckleshoot people. Three in-person (with Zoom option) classes were offered. The first class involved a tour of the Muckleshoot Tribal College built in 2003 on the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation. There was also a tour of the Berry Garden, started by Valerie Segrest in 2011, which is considered an outdoor classroom with plants that are home to the Muckleshoots. Some of the plants are Salal, Yarrow, Hawthorn, Oregon grape, Blueberry, Hazelnut tree, and Wild Rose. The plants in the garden are so strong they thrive without care from a gardener/humans. This is a testament to the medicine of the plants and a testament of the tribal knowledge of our people of how to be in tune with the environment. More gardens like this should be created and utilized due to the profound effect it can have on those who participate in the garden. It was strategic to have part of the class outside. Native people may not spend as much time outside as our ancestors used to, but gardens like these encourage our people to be outside in our natural environment to taste and feel the healing and strength of our plant people.

The second in-person class was at Elliott Bay, part of the usual and accustomed waters of the Muckleshoot people. Will Bill, Jr., the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe Cultural Director, with his team of cultural practitioners, took the students out into a tribal canoe. Students and instructors participated in pulling together in the canoe on the waters of the Salish Sea.

The Tribal Canoe Journey for the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe (MIT) is an annual demonstration of traditional lifeways and an expression of a Sovereign Nation. For thousands of years, ancestors traveled in cedar canoes as their primary mode of transportation. Over the past twenty-five years the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe has been revitalizing their canoe society, beginning with the Paddle to Seattle in 1989, where a shovel nose canoe carved and manned by the tribe participated. (Willard Bill, Jr.)

We will share the course description, overview, and student learning outcomes for the class below.

Course description: Provides an in-depth understanding of the lived and unique perspectives within Indigenous leadership across education and community contexts, including tribal, community, civic, and P-20 educational settings. This course will empower

students to develop and strengthen Indigenous worldviews while making connections within and across tribal and diverse Indigenous communities.

Overview and Student Learning Outcomes

This course centers and connects Indigenous leadership concepts, perspectives, and theories within a range of education and community contexts. This foundational course empowers students' understanding of who they are within their own cultural framework and how they apply Indigenous based leadership theories and models.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- ▶ Examine recent Indigenous leadership research, theory, and practice. (AK) (Fulfilled through: Indigenous Leadership Interviews, Collaboration Readings, and Curriculum Development Project.
- ▶ Evaluate leadership and organizational effectiveness through Indigenous lenses. (RL) (Fulfilled through: Canoe Journey Practice and Reflection Paper, selected readings from Native Education Leadership from the Pacific Muckleshoot: Promoting Native Ways of Knowing, Traditions and Culture.)
- ▶ Learn to lead the development of culturally responsive educational organizations through Indigenous-based approaches. (DD) (Fulfilled through reading and discussing Sacred Circle, Selected Readings).
- ▶ Center and reclaim one's personal Indigenous identity and connections with personal and community leadership values, assumptions, priorities, beliefs, and behaviors. (H) (Fulfilled through: 2 Minute Film Creation)
- ▶ Analyze, assess, and develop recommendations to improve an educational setting for Indigenous students and communities. (H) (Fulfilled through: Discussion Boards and Curriculum Project).

7. Creating Indigenous Centered Belongingness and Honoring Sovereignty in Higher Education

In this section, we share three actions that can be cultivated for a sense of belonging for Native American students. These are essential for colleges and universities to consider, whether at the student affairs or in academic affairs. Cultivating a sense of belonging for Native American students needs to be systemic and embedded in institutional values if they want to create spaces where Native students want to attend and where Tribal communities want to partner and build relationships.

7.1. *Indigenizing the Concept of Belonging through Honoring Tribal Lands and Place*

Indigenizing is the calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands, and it is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing liberation. Indigenizing also recognizes the cultural rights of communities in accordance with their identity, history, and culture. With Indigenizing practices being at the core of honoring tribal lands and place, the development of respectful learning environments and community collaborations that honor, while embracing the diversity of, Indigenous Peoples. If we are to look at how colonization created the identities of both the colonized and the colonizer, we must recognize the historical situations are created by people, but people are, in turn, created by these situations.

A person's worldview is formed and guided by distinct histories and social, economic, and political realities that exist within colonized practices.

Therefore, Indigenizing has a special role to play in promoting equity, in particular regarding access to and participation in transformed culturally relevant educational practices that should include a wide range of opportunities for students to engage with issues that relate to the importance of diverse, traditional knowledge. A commitment to Indigenizing is to further strengthen and promote inclusion, equal access, equitable treatment, cultural understanding, and the prevention of discrimination. The role of Indigenizing underscores

the need to remember the past, the present, and the future impact of sociopolitical injustices of Indigenous Peoples.

7.2. Honoring Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Higher Education

There is a need for placed-based Indigenized education through the integration of Indigenous perspectives in curricula, program development, research, and other educational training contexts. This perspective immerses students in local cultures, languages, landscapes, and research experiences to decolonize beyond “who decides for whom” the meaning to educate. It is also imperative to integrate placed-based Indigenous Knowledges, languages, cultural protocols, and participation by both students and Indigenous communities to uplift geographical diversity. Indigenous Knowledges forge strong ties between institutions and communities for respectful collaborative partnerships to design culturally relevant programs that place value on the needs and interests of Indigenous Peoples definition of success as well as acknowledge the political realities of Indigenous communities.

7.3. Collective and Collaborative Approaches to Supporting Indigenous Students

Recentring tribal values that are situated in collectivity and collaboration in this Tribal and University partnership in how we cultivated belonging for the Muckleshoot Doctoral students and honored sovereignty in our praxis is an example for other institutions and partnerships. When institutions of higher education are building an equity-minded approach it needs to be situated and rooted in the communities they are responsible to and where the students are from. If our students cannot see themselves in the ways we support them, then we are in a constant tug of war of belonging that will never be won. How can we re-shift the belonging for students that doesn't take away from their identities and spirits to ways that honor who they are, their ancestors' stories, and family and community teachings? This begins with being centered in collective and collaborative approaches to support Indigenous students and students of color.

8. Conclusions

In closing, we share this storying of the bəqəlšul (Muckleshoot) tribal partnership with the University of Washington Tacoma School of Education. We have weaved in the ancestral connections through those who came before us to honor the heartwork that has unfolded today. We are at a time when centering Tribal and Indigenous identities and values is being carried out in more intentional ways and we share out our lived examples that tie back to the seven principles shared by Archibald (2008): respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, inter-relatedness, and synergy. We call on institutions of higher education to broaden their definitions of what it means to cultivate and respect Indigenous Knowledges as an inherent, sovereign right through a more just and equitable environment. If Tribe's and Native students do not see themselves in those frameworks, there is more heartwork to be done. We share our story as a way of cultivating a vision of higher education that centers Tribal voice and will remain with the students who have experienced it.

Author Contributions: We would like to acknowledge that the contributions of everyone whether in thought, conception, or birthed, are of equal weight and representation. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data sharing not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Puyallup Tribe of Indians. Available online: <http://puyallup-tribe.com/ourtribe/> (accessed on 15 July 2022).
2. Minthorn, R. Being BRAVE in the Ivory Towers as “Zape-tah-hol-ah” (Sticks with Bow). In *Counternarratives from Women of Color Academics: Bravery, Vulnerability, and Resistance*; Whitaker, M.C., Grollman, E.A., Eds.; Routledge Publishing: Boca Raton, FL, USA, 2018.
3. Minthorn, R.; Montgomery, M.; Bill, D. Reclaiming Emotions: Re-Unlearning and Re-Learning Discourses of Healing in a Tribally Placed Doctoral Cohort. *Genealogy* **2021**, *5*, 24. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
4. Fox, M.J.T.; Lowe, S.C.; McClellan, G.S. (Eds.) *Serving Native American students. New Directions for Student Services* 109; Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA, USA, 2005.
5. Brayboy, B.M.J.; Fann, A.; Castagno, A.E.; Solyom, J.A. *Postsecondary Education for American Indian and Alaska natives: Higher Education for Nation Building and Self-Determination*; Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA, USA, 2012.
6. Shotton, H.J.; Lowe, S.C.; Waterman, S.J. (Eds.) *Beyond the Asterisk: Understanding Native Students in Higher Education*; Stylus: Sterling, VA, USA, 2013.
7. Brayboy, B.M.J.; Solyom, J.A.; Castagno, A.E. Indigenous students in higher education. *J. Am. Indian Educ.* **2015**, *54*, 154–186.
8. Minthorn, R.S.; Shotton, H.J. Native American students in higher education. In *Today's College Students*; Sasso, P.A., de Vitis, J.L., Eds.; Peter Lang: New York, NY, USA, 2015; pp. 31–43.
9. Montgomery, M.R. *Identity Politics of Difference the Mixed-Race American Indian Experience*; University Press of Colorado: Boulder, CO, USA, 2017.
10. Lopez, J.D.; Marley, S.C. Postsecondary research and recommendations for federal datasets with American Indians and Alaska Natives: Challenges and future directions. *J. Am. Indian Educ.* **2018**, *57*, 5–34. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
11. Salis Reyes, N.A.; Shotton, H.J. Bringing visibility to the needs and interests of Indigenous students: Implications for research, policy, and practice. In *Policy Report Commissioned by the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE)*; National Institute for Transformation and Equity: Bloomington, IN, USA, 2018.
12. Brayboy, B.M.J.; Castagno, A.E.; Solyom, J.A. Looking into the hearts of Native peoples: Nation building as an institutional orientation for graduate education. *Am. J. Educ.* **2014**, *120*, 575–596. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
13. Brayboy, B.M.J.; Huaman, E.S. A journey to higher education: Origins of an Indigenous doctoral program. *J. Am. Indian Educ.* **2016**, *55*, 134–147. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
14. Keene, A.; Tachine, A.R.; Nelson, C.A. Braiding our (in)visibility: Native women navigating the doctoral process through social media. *J. Committed Soc. Change Race Ethn.* **2017**, *3*, 39–72. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
15. Nelson, C.A. Unapologetically Indigenous: Understanding the Doctoral Process through Self-Reflexivity. *Genealogy* **2021**, *5*, 7. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
16. Shotton, H.J. Reciprocity and Nation Building in Native Women's Doctoral Education. *Am. Indian Q.* **2018**, *42*, 488–507. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
17. Shotton, H.J. “I Thought You'd Call Her White Feather”: Native Women and Racial Microaggressions in Doctoral Education. *J. Am. Indian Educ.* **2017**, *56*, 32–54. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
18. Alejandro Fong, C.J.; De La Rosa, Y.M. Indigenous Graduate and Professional Students Decolonizing, Reconciling, and Indigenizing Belongingness in Higher Education. *J. Coll. Stud. Dev.* **2020**, *61*, 679–696. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
19. Minthorn, R.S.Z. Indigenizing the Doctoral Experience to Build Indigenous Community Leaders in Educational Leadership. *J. Cases Educ. Leadersh.* **2020**, *23*, 61–66. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
20. Archibald, J. *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*; UBC Press: Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2008.
21. Anahuay Mentoring LLC. Available online: <https://anahuaymentoring.wordpress.com> (accessed on 15 July 2022).