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Culturally Responsive Professional Development Programs for Teacher Educators Using Community-Based Collaborative Learning: Lessons Learned from a Native American Community

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Abstract: Earners from Native American communities in the U.S. experience unfamiliar curricula that are designed and implemented by educators from the dominant culture who are often unprepared to meet the needs of diverse leaners. Consequently, teacher education programs have a responsibility to equipe preservice teachers with knowledge and skills essential to integrating culturally relevant contents. Therefore, this collaborative autoethnography conducted as a teacher-educator professional development program, explored the perspectives of Native Peoples on preferred pedagogical approaches for Indigenous learners. Data were collected through autobiographical notes, written reflections, focus groups, interactive activities with study participants, and structured interviews. A thematic analysis resulted in two findings, that is, importance of contextually appropriate curriculum and the value of community-based collaborative learning professional development activities in supporting authentic culturally responsive lessons for teacher educators. Among other recommendations, the data support the enactment of teacher education programs that support intentional culturally collaborative Community-Based Professional Development activities between educators and Indigenous Peoples.

Keywords: professional development; collaborative autoethnography; community-based professional development; Native American learners; Native American students; teacher educators; teacher education; preservice teachers; culturally responsive teaching; culturally responsive schooling

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1. Introduction

This collaborative autoethnographic study [1] was implemented in a teacher education program situated in a rural state university in the Rocky Mountain west of the United States (U.S.), where both researchers worked. While a majority (92.3%) of the people living in that region were White, the population of American Indians and Alaska Native was 2.8% [2]. Students' demographics followed a similar trend that was also reported by the National Center for Education Statistics [3]. Those data showed that, in 2020–21, 80 percent of public-school teachers in the U.S. were White. Notwithstanding, the same report indicated that American classrooms were becoming more racially and ethnically diverse.

Although all teachers have value in the classroom, White educators tend to exhibit deficit mindsets towards learners from historically marginalized groups [4,5]. Other scholars Sleeter [6] (p. 560) have argued that "White teachers often have more difficulty forming constructive relationships with students of color, particularly African American students, than with White students". In addition, Ciampa and Reisboard [7] reported that, although there has been "a significant increase in the representation of students from diverse backgrounds, including Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native, novice teachers, regardless of race, "find themselves ill-prepared to incorporate culturally responsive strategies into their instruction practices" (p. 1). This conundrum will continue as long as teacher educators lack expertise in Culturally Responsive Teaching [8]. As a remedy, both pre- and in-service teachers should be exposed to pertinent knowledge

and skills through traditional college coursework and by participating in professional development programs. Highlighting the benefits of professional development programs, Cochran-Smith and Lytle [9] considered them ideal pathways to equip teachers with cultural knowledge and competences essential to teaching learners from diverse backgrounds.

Culturally responsive teacher educators understand and value the role of diversity in today's societies, including schools and classrooms. Among other benefits, culturally responsive educators are likely to infuse cultural knowledge and adapt their curricula and pedagogy to the dynamics of differences in the classroom [10]. While substantial research focuses on educating preservice teachers for culturally responsive (CR) teaching, few studies examine pertinent training strategies in support of in-service teachers [4,11]. Given that teacher educators play an important role in preparing CR preservice teachers, it is essential to explore practices to help them gain meaningful learning about CR teaching. In this study, we use we used the following attributes to define Culturally Responsive Teaching: (a) Culturally Responsive Teaching validates, affirms, and empowers learners by using cultural knowledge, making use of prior learner experiences, and planning learning experiences that are meaningful and relevant to learners. (b) "It bridges home and school cultures by factoring students' lived sociocultural realities" [4] (p. 37). (c) Teachers use differentiated instruction. (d) Teachers use learning resources and materials that are contextual, or place-based. (e) Teachers work in collaboration with families and communities.

This study explored the perspectives of Native Peoples about preferred pedagogical approaches for Indigenous learners. Also, it examined the effects of a planned professional development program in assisting two teacher educators (hereafter referenced as researchers) acquire knowledge and skills essential to teaching Native American students. Being both participants and researchers, we used collaborative autoethnography because it allows the researchers to describe and interpret their personal experiences to understand cultural experiences. Community-based learning is largely used to improve teacher practices. Community-Based Professional Development (CPD) has demonstrated advantages over individual-based training in terms of generating real improvements in practice [12]. Additionally, collaborative autoethnography and community-based learning, when used for professional development, support the researchers conducting a self-critique of their own experience other than just reporting the participant's perspective [12,13]. Other researchers [14] contend the CPD allows for interactions with communities, supporting authentic cultural experiences that sustain teachers' knowledge about other cultures, thus promoting Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). Two research questions guided this study:

1. What do Native American teachers and community members perceive to be culturally acceptable curriculum practice/s for Native American learners?
2. How might community-based learning support teacher educators' professional development in Culturally Responsive Teaching?

This research adds to the existing minimal literature on culturally responsive teacher-educator professional development. In addition, it has practical implications for teacher education programs.

2. Literature Review

Culturally Responsive Professional Development Program for Teacher Educators

Teacher educators should take the responsibility of preparing teacher candidates who are capable of teaching and addressing the needs of diverse leaners [15]. This can be a challenging task if teacher educators themselves are not culturally responsive [16]. Many faculty members are from the traditional majority culture and therefore lack experience working with diverse populations [17]. When teacher educators and teacher candidates represent the dominant culture, the development of cross-cultural competence and understanding can be hampered [18]. Unfortunately, the impact of a monocultural faculty in higher education is often ignored. To that end, some scholars have observed that "much of the literature on diversity and teacher education is silent on the cultural homogene-

ity of the teacher education faculty" [16] (p. 230). Teacher educators who are culturally competent understand and value the role of diversity in today's society, including schools and classrooms [10]. Consequently, some scholars [19] have stipulated that there is an urgent need to improve how White teachers are prepared to teach diverse students. In addition to preparing culturally responsive preservice teachers, teacher educators need to use culturally inclusive instructional practices. Yet, despite the need for high-quality teacher education, the professional development of teacher educators--those who teach the teachers [17] has been largely overlooked.

Teacher educators have profound influence on the development of preservice teachers [18–20]. Scholars have provided goals for teacher-educator professional development to include the following: (1) to improve their own practice, (2) to gain knowledge about teacher education, and (3) to contribute to the broader knowledge based on teacher education [9]. As a result, we designed a Community-Based Professional Development program to help us gain cultural awareness and experience while being immersed in Indigenous cultures [18]. Studies on the effects of cultural immersion reveal that they are likely to support the development of cultural competence [15]. Other studies show that working in diverse community settings heightened the awareness of others and increased interest in building cultural bridges [20].

Addressing the apparent lack of enough cultural professional development programs for teacher educators, scholars have considered it professional neglect [21,22]. To ameliorate the issue, it is critical [20,23] to implement professional development programs that emphasize teaching as a process or a professional journey that encompasses collaboration with other educators, ongoing self-reflection as a way of becoming teacher practitioner, and embracing mentorship roles or supporting novice teachers. However, educators should not be forced to participate in professional development activities. Thus, participation based on personal choice is recommended [24]. Consistent with these recommendations, we immersed ourselves in a Native American community to gain essential cultural knowledge and skills, using a collaborative autoethnography research approach.

3. Theoretical Framework

The frameworks of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS), and Community-Based Professional Development (CPD) grounded this collaborative autoethnography study. CRT and CRS are based on the premises that culture is important and that teachers should consider students' cultural experiences and their social contexts when structuring learning activities. CRS is based on the premises that "heritage language" and cultures of particular indigenous tribes are a "fundamental prerequisite for the development of culturally healthy students and communities" [23] (p. 941). Therefore, both CRT and CRS support mastery of cultural competencies essential to educating learners of diverse cultural heritage [4]. Among other cultural skills, teacher self-awareness is recommended in order to clearly understand and appreciate students' views. In addition to having similar views, Nieto and Rolon [24] invited educators to first interrogate existing views about diversity to establish learning spaces that welcome cultural diversity. Becoming a culturally sensitive educator is possible because people learn cultural competence, or the ability to effectively interact, work, and develop meaningful relationships with people of various cultural backgrounds [24].

Developing cultural competency is a process. To that end, some scholars [25,26] recommend that teachers participate regularly in professional development activities. Teacher educators ought to continually seek new ways to meet the needs of diverse leaners by participating in learning activities that immerse them in unfamiliar diverse cultures [27,28]. Community-Based Professional Development (CPD) programs are likely to support teacher educators' professional development because they tend to be interactive, contextual, and experiential [28,29]. Largely because CPD programs are informed by the principles of social learning theory, they emphasize learning through social interactions [29,30]. Therefore, CPD programs promote learning for people with shared interest in a particular domain

interacting on an ongoing basis to develop expertise in an area [28]. The approach supports learning and is a tool for sharing and nurturing knowledge [29,31]. In CPDs where social learning is used to support professional development, meeting each other face to face or online is a prerequisite for production of results [31]. Social-learning professional development differs from traditional scheduled day-to-day workshops and requires the teacher to be an active player when acquiring knowledge [29,31]. Knowledge is created within networks [27]. In general, CPD is also considered as Community of Practice (COP) [28].

CPD and COP both include collaborative learning as a key element [11]. Collaboration during CPD makes learning effective by involving participants actively and interactively. Learning becomes active when instructors engage physically, cognitively, and emotionally, especially during discussion sessions, problem solving, and reflecting on learner viewpoints and ideas. Furthermore, CPD supports networking as a way of encouraging innovative ideas and developing new information and skills [11,32].

4. Research Design

4.1. Materials and Methods

We used collaborative autoethnography to explore the perspectives of Native Peoples regarding preferred pedagogical approaches for Indigenous learners. Autoethnography is related to ethnography, a research approach that focuses on understanding people's perspectives [33–35]. Collaborative ethnography emerged in the early part of the twenty-first century as a prominent mode of ethnographic research [33]. Borrowing from collaborative ethnography, autoethnography emphasizes collaboration at every point of ethnography [33,35]. The use of collaborative autoethnography, therefore, enabled us to share our cultural insights in data-source format [32,34]. Additionally, applying an autoethnographic study approach enabled us to reflect on and interpret our stories and experiences collaboratively [36] because collaborative autoethnography is more than narrating stories, rather it allows readers to feel moral dilemmas, [to] think with our story instead of about it [37]. Autoethnography allows the researcher to serve as both a study subject and researcher [38]. Thus, we used collaborative autoethnography to document the knowledge and skills we gained from the planned professional development activities.

Collaborative research models have value in that they establish space for idea exchanges between the researcher and research participants [35,38]. Furthermore, the participatory nature of Community-Based Professional Development (CPD) programs borrows from collaborative ethnography to boost trust building between the researcher and study subjects [39,40]. As a qualitative research methodology, autoethnography addresses the concerns associated with understanding self and others and supports the pooling of stories to help discover their respective meanings [34,39]. Thus, we used collaborative autoethnography because it not only helped us to reflect on our own learning, but it also helped us to hold meaningful conversations with participants on their perspectives when sitting down, one on one to talk things out [34,40].

4.2. Study Participants

Participant were Native American teachers and elders from one community located in a rural state in the Rocky Mountain Region. To identify participants, we used a snowball sampling procedure. As a research methodology, snowball sampling enables the researcher to recruit one person. Then, that person invites others into the study in a chain referral process [33,41]. The researchers preferred snowball sampling because it allows already identified participants to assist in recruiting additional contributors [33,40]. Therefore, we adopted snowball sampling after inviting a respected community elder and educator, who then helped us identify other potential participants. In the end, we recruited 20 participants composed of 8 educators, 4 community elders involved with education matters, and 8 cultural stakeholders. Furthermore, we adopted recommendations for conducting research in Indigenous communities (University of Alaska Fairbanks, Institutional Review Board, n.p) by not only consulting regularly with local communities but also situating their respective po-

sitions and interests. As we immersed ourselves in the local Native community and consulted regularly with community members, we remained cognizant of our own cultural biases.

4.3. Positionality

Both researchers are members of marginalized groups. Furthermore, they taught various courses in education foundations, diversity, and inclusion for a teacher education program situated in rural Rocky Mountain Region, isolated from more culturally diverse metropolises. Echoing the findings of the National Center for Education Statistics [3], the general faculty members at this teacher education program were predominantly from the dominant group. Consequently, as marginalized people, the two researchers lived and worked as "a fly in the milk" [42]. Despite that reality, they chose to work in this teacher education program, recognizing that faculty members of color in higher education not only mentor learners from marginalized backgrounds but also amplify the voices of minoritized groups [43,44]. Therefore, in solidarity with Indigenous communities as allies, we undertook this collaborative ethnographic research, focusing primarily on exploring pedagogical approaches crucial to supporting culturally sustaining educational practices [45].

To document our experiences, we used a co/autoethnography research approach [1]. A co/autoethnography helped us to capture our own professional learning and experiences in order to inform our practices as teacher educators. As teacher educators, our goal was to learn from Native American teachers and community members the instructional strategies they deemed appropriate and meaningful for Native American learners. We also intended to use the gained instructional strategies to prepare our preservice teachers for Culturally Responsive Teaching [10,45,46].

4.4. Data Collection

To participate in the study, all participants (n = 20) completed consent forms, as required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) that approved the study. To collect qualitative data, we used Community-Based Professional Development (CPD) activities to form interactive focus groups that addressed educational and cultural topics generated by participants. Focus-group discussions were based on both structured and open-ended questions. Focus groups were used in this study to allow participants opportunities to respond to the issues being discussed [47–49].

Other data were generated from participants' reflective writings, audio recordings of collaborative discussions, and our own autoethnographic writing and journaling [1,49,50]. In addition, we collected data from interviews of randomly selected participants from the larger group (n = 6) where researchers asked probing questions, as needed. All interviews were conducted either before or after the planned focus group activities and lasted up to one hour. Questions for focus group activities ensured structured interviews (see questions in Table 1). Each focus-group session was guided by a professional expert who used various principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching, including role playing [48,51,52].

Data were collected over a period of 3 months, including six intensive days of collaborative discussions that lasted roughly 4-to-5 h each. Community members helped to moderate discussions and also determined the discussion formats of the settings that were approved by the lead researcher and community elder. Both researchers participated in all activities as participants and researchers based on essential practices of Community-Based Professional Development programs.

The first session established relationships and partnerships. By creating positive relationships, we intentionally placed both participants and researchers on the same level as fellow learners [50,53]. Venues for all research meetings were identified by community elders. Because the focus groups lasted for several hours, lunch was provided and paid for through an internal grant secured by the lead researcher. The table below highlights the activities involved in the Community-Based Professional Development (CPD) program.

Table 1. Focus groups: community-based learning activities.

Community-Based Focus Groups	Activities
Focus-Group Session 1: introductions and alliance building Objectives: 1. Sharing collective stories both inside and outside the classroom. 2. Examining the meaning of "meaningful education" for Native Americans.	Activity # 1: Introductions 1. Tell us who you are, the role you play/ed in your school/communities 2. Tell us about your work with Indigenous students/communities. What does that look like from your perspective? Activity # 2: Discuss meaningful education for Native American children—opportunities and challenges. Guiding questions (a) What is meaningful education for Native American children/leaners? (b) What challenges exist for Indigenous education? (c) What are your success stories? Scheduled time: 4.5 h
Session 2: Reflecting on practices essential to promoting Native American education Objectives 1. Considering how relationships between the various entities/settings influence the education of Native American children.	Activity: Discuss community mindset relative to the success of Native American learners. The role of: • Schools, • Teachers, • Teacher educators, • The community. Activity 2: How can schools serve Indigenous children effectively? • What do schools and educators need to know about community that can help support Native American students? • What instructional strategies could be most helpful? Scheduled time: 4.5 h
Session 3: Exploring culture Objective 1. Exploring culture. 2. Identify strategies to affirm heritage cultures to enhance school experiences for Native American learners.	Activity 1: Exploring culture 1. How do we understand culture individually and collectively? 2. What aspects of Native American culture should be implemented in the classroom and why? Activity # 2 Preparing schools/classrooms for Native American leaners • How might schools be ready for Indigenous students? • What do we need to address? Scheduled time: 5 h

4.5. Data Analysis

Collaborative autoethnography, in general, is analyzed thematically [50,53]. To make sense of the transcribed raw data, the researchers studied those data individually through open coding [47,51]. Then, they conducted a collaborative data analysis, where they compared findings from individual analysis. For inter-recorder reliability, each researcher coded the data set alone before doing so collaboratively [53,54]. In addition to asking clarifying questions during collaborative meetings, the researchers elaborated on their respective thoughts; probed for more information; and infused relevant artifacts, such as quotes and cultural materials.

To ensure the accurate representation of analyzed data, the researchers conducted member checks; that is, they corroborated with participants. By verifying with participants, the researchers were not only able to make full meaning of data, but they also gained additional insights from community members [55–58].

Several minor themes emerged that the researchers presented to participants for member-check [53,54]. Using the theoretical frameworks of Community-Based Professional Development (CPD), Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), and Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS), the researchers collapsed those minor themes into two robust ones, that is, the importance of culturally and contextually acceptable curriculum and the benefits of collaborative Community-Based Professional Development (CPD) activities. Using

pseudonyms and general pronouns (e.g., they, their, etc.) as needed to protect participants' identities, we discuss the major themes in the Results section.

4.6. Limitation

Because this study is limited to one Native American community, findings might not be generalizable. However, given that experience with oppression and colonization is a commonality among Native Peoples globally, it is probable that some of our findings could be applicable to other groups of Indigenous People. Regarding our methodological approach, despite our attempts to be inclusive, it is possible that some voices were amplified due to individual differences within participants. However, we tried to mitigate this potential drawback by having rotational participation during discussions and conversations. Meanwhile, in spite of our attempts as researchers to draw experiential consensus, participants had diverse understandings and experiences, which is a common occurrence in qualitative studies of this nature [59]. Notwithstanding the aforementioned limitations, our study contributes to the existing literature on the education of Native American learners [23,60], Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), and Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS). Furthermore, it addresses the importance of Community-Based Professional Development (CPD) programs for teacher educators.

Overall, we believe that our study makes positive contributions to the research community, teacher education, and education in general.

5. Results

5.1. Culturally and Contextually Acceptable Curriculum Practice/s

This theme has two subthemes, that is, listening to people's stories, and preferences of contextually appropriate and culturally responsive education.

5.2. Listening to People's Stories and Histories Is Integral to Successful Teaching and Learning for Indigenous Children

The data revealed the participants' general preference for an education where educators not only listened to Native American students' stories but also considered caringly contextual factors essential to effective learning. Thus, participants reported the importance of listening to personal and people/tribal stories and histories. To participants, education should be relevant to children's lives. To that end, Dakota reported the following:

> When I was going to school, many of the things I learned were not representative of Indigenous Peoples. Why did I have to wait until my college years to learn things I should have learned in elementary classrooms about our history? Why was there a focus on Euro-western values? I have seen children's books in classrooms that teachers use, and they have nothing to do with Native American children. Our stories do matter! We should not use blanket educational practices. One educational approach does not fit all. Addressing the issue of curricula silencing, Gaudry [58] focused on the lack of Native American stories in formal curriculum, a reality that was reported by Cheyenne, another participant in our study. Reflecting on the matter, Cheyenne commented as follows:

> From an early age, I recognized that our stories were not in the books we used. Having attended school off the reservation, in a non-native community, I experienced firsthand the differing value systems in school versus my community. This experience is common for many Indigenous students, but it was not until I became a teacher myself that I was aware of how deeply these value systems impact our actions and choices as teachers and learners.

By listening to Indigenous People's voices, the researchers learned about the value of authentic lived experiences that were not replicable by reading a textbook. For example, many Native Americans have strong beliefs in spirituality; thus, our meetings were started

with a prayer of wellness. By sharing their stories, the participants showed diverse lived experiences. For example, Aiyana shared their lived experience thus:

> I am an educator and father. I teach early childhood (Kindergarten/first grade). I remember when I started my teaching career in a school where majority of the students were Native American, but all administrators were from the dominant group and mostly white males. While I faced discrimination and stereotyping, my worst experience was not being listened to when I reported incidents where Native children told me about being bullied, called names, or demeaned by children from the mainstream. This was disheartening. I kept recording the incidents and reporting until the administrators were ready to address the issue. The administration did not listen to my stories, and that of Indigenous learners. It was not important to them.

In the above reflection, Aiyana shared school experiences that commonly impacted Indigenous children. However, the story is personalized and owned. It is authentic and meaningful. Furthermore, it invites educators and school administrators to pay attention to the stories shared by both school students and adults. The sharing of stories is consistent with various principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). Personal stories are "powerful means for people to establish bridges across other factors that separate them (such as race, culture, gender, and social class), penetrate barriers to understanding, creating feelings of kindred" [4,59].

When people listen to each other's stories, they are able to appreciate each other as humans [4]. Meanwhile, Aiyana's story reviewed the continued presence of oppression, the silencing of Native American children and communities, and, hence, the need to address issues of oppression and privilege which are detrimental to the education of Native American leaners [23,61]. Scholars have concluded that the current silencing of Indigenous Peoples is a continuation of colonialization and its vastitudes bent on dehumanizing the Native People [23,62,63]. Therefore, it is critical for scholars to respect and foreground Indigenous People's stories and epistemologies [18,64]. Thus, in our interactions with participants, we used a Community-Based Professional Development (CPD) approach to help us access community stories and experience. Among other benefits, collaborative experiences create ideal space for new insights and nuances. For example, while listening to Cheyenne's story, we learned that she considered herself as follows [18,23,62]:

> Female, a mother, grandparent, and an elder. I have worked in many roles, among them as an educator and an activist to bring back Native languages to school. All these are important to Native American education, especially because language play an important part in our lives as native people. It is what makes us who we are. Yet, our language is often left out of the curriculum even when most of the children and Native people want to learn our languages.

As we listened to Cheyenne's story, we learned that using Native languages facilitated learning for Native American children. Similarly, Dakota held comparable sentiments in their stand for Native American students being accorded opportunities to learn in their respective Native languages. Clearly, the frameworks of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS) support educational practices that that use heritage languages [27,61,64].

In conclusion, listening to the stories of Native American is crucial to providing culturally responsive education for Indigenous children.

5.3. Preferences of Contextually Appropriate and Culturally Responsive Education

The data revealed that both Native American teachers and community members preferred school settings that valued and accepted Indigenous People's cultural practices. Furthermore, all data sets reported the importance of infusing Indigenous People's ways of knowing in classroom curriculum. For example, while responding to a discussion item on perceived helpful teaching strategies, all participants noted that it was essential to consider

a curriculum where learners were not just listened to but also empowered. To Kimane, for education to be meaningful and empowering, it should address the following:

> Whole child by teaching our children basic life skills that can be used to promote independence and self-sustaining. Helping children and youth to actively participate and work by developing life skills that promote success as adults.

Similarly, Bodaway considered an empowering education as one that factored:

> Environmental factors where children are growing and provide therapy in different forms to help children to start healing as soon as they experience trauma from life events such as racism, sexism, discrimination, addicted parents, or other forms of harassment at school and in home environments.

Bodaway considered schools where teachers provided life skills as caring centers that cause positive things to happen in children's lives. A caring education is contextually appropriate and guided by various principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Culturally Responsive Schools (CRS). Caring is a major pillar of CRT and is manifested through teacher actions, such as possessing an affirming attitude, holding high expectations for all learners, treating all students humanely, and being genuinely concerned about students' lives and well-being [4] (p. 59). Meanwhile, other data showed that participants preferred instructional strategies that incorporated Indigenous ways of knowing. To that end, Aponi reported that although education for Native American learners has improved over the years, the current nature of schooling still privileges dominant cultural ways of doing while ignoring ways of Indigenous communities [57,62,65]. As a remedy, Kumana recommended placing more Native teachers in every school, as is evident in the following feedback:

> I have always maintained that child of color, ... (notes Tribal affiliation)..... These children will learn best when the teacher is Tribal or another minority. These teachers understand how it is to be marginalized and have more empathy towards Native American children. They do not wear a mask of pretention because they are genuine and the acknowledge students' way of life.

The other data demonstrated that participants preferred culturally inclusive education. Specifically, they favored an education that embraced Native Peoples' values. Therefore, participants preferred to use peoples' culture/s and standards to plan for teaching. Furthermore, they invited curricula planners to recognize differences in Native Peoples' cultures. Therefore, in addition to requiring the use of culturally representative teaching and learning resources, the data showed that participants expected educators not to use a one-size-fits-all teaching approach. Rather, the use of diversified and contextualized educational practices should be the norm in order to meet the diverse needs of Indigenous learners [65–67]. Furthermore, the data showed that participants preferred educators who were able to establish positive relationships with Indigenous families and students.

To participants, quality learning happened when educators made an essential effort to know their students on a personal level. Specifically, participants reported that learning about learners' stories and giving them a voice was/is integral to the quality teaching of Indigenous students. In a conversation with Ahiga about ways to support Native American learners they reported the following:

> Many of our Native students (from this community) have not experience success in schooling due to a variety of reasons..... Thus, they deem themselves unable to learn and incapable of success.....They eventually give up and decide education is not worthwhile. These students need affirmation. School can attempt to be proactive by providing strategies that assist them to learn and become successful. Teachers should encourage learners to take pride in their Native American Heritage. Life is a challenge, but when a person is proud of their cultural heritage, and who they are as a person, they become more successful in anything they attempt to do.

Specifically, Ahiga conceived culturally relevant and contextually appropriate education essential teaching strategies for Native American learners. In essence, participants were advocating for a culturally responsive education.

Addressing the importance of an education that is culturally responsive, Gay [4] contended that its focus on ensuring cultural congruity between home and classroom cultures was especially helpful. An education for cultural congruence invites heritage languages, a notion that was also identified by participants in our study. While listening to learners' stories was essential, participants expressed that they saw value in any education that welcomed the use of Indigenous languages in school environments [62,68,69]. Reflecting on the rationale for supporting heritage languages, Ahiga reported that use of home languages enabled "children to maintain their cultural identities and connections to their communities". Therefore, participants welcomed the use of dual languages instead of adopting English only as the default language of instruction.

Other scholars have held similar views in support of heritage languages [62,69]. Among other benefits, home languages enable learners to contextualize learning. To that end, a curriculum that natured use of home languages is supported by many scholars [4,67,70]. An education that supports heritage languages is also culturally sustaining because it "seeks to perpetuate and foster-to sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of democratic schooling. . .. while. . .. supporting both traditional and evolving ways of cultural connectedness for contemporary youth" [62] (p. 95). To participants, such a curriculum is contextually appropriate.

Finally, although Native Americans have historically experienced a lot of adversity, the data showed that community-based activities where stories and cultural traditions are shared help to support and strengthen their students in school and in their daily lives. Discussing the importance of sharing stories and cultural tradition as a strength, Dakota noted the following:

> When we tell stories about our traditional ceremonies, it helps to connect the present to the past and to make meaning of life events. Children learn about our culture, their identities, the strengths of their communities. These are all important aspects of supporting Indigenous student do well in education because they reflect, we are a strong people even though we have gone through a lot of negative history.

In conclusions, participants recommended the use of a contextually appropriate education for Indigenous learners because it had relevance.

5.4. Community-Based Professional Development (CPD) Activities Provided Authentic Culturally Responsive Lessons for Teacher Educators

The data from our ethnographic writings and discussions revealed how those activities helped us, as researchers, interpret our lived personal and professional experiences. Overall, though, the data showed that there is value in Community-Based Professional Development activities for teacher educators. For example, after participating in focus-group discussions, we gained invaluable cultural insights. Below, we present one such lesson.

> As a teacher educator, I often tell my preservice teachers about the need to provide authentic experiences in the classroom. In addition, I emphasize the use of differentiated instruction. Obviously, the opportunity to hear directly from Indigenous people made this pedagogical principle real and purposeful. All our interactions with teachers and community members were opportunities to learn about culturally responsive teaching (Sailor-Researcher).

Similarly, Madela (another researcher) had a cultural awakening relative to the importance of using heritage languages in instructional settings. As a result of this autoethnography, Madela realized that, as a diversity and inclusion educator, they rarely personalized the use of heritage languages for instruction. Rather, they tended to teach it from a theoretical/pedagogical lens. However, after hearing Indigenous People advocating for heritage

languages, they awoke to the reality that, as a person who spoke a first language other than English, hearing things in one's own heritage language was much more meaningful. Thus, they resolved to be more intentional and purposeful while teaching about the value of differentiated instruction. Meanwhile, the use of Community-Based Professional Development (CPD) activities exposed the critical nature of active involvement in the learning process as a co-constructor of relevant culturally responsive learning.

The data showed that establishing ongoing community interactions aided in the process of creating trusting relationships [70–72] between different cultural groups. To confirm this finding, Aliga reminded the participants and researchers during one of the planned professional development meetings that they (the researchers) were not Indigenous Peoples. Consequently, we clarified that we were indeed outsiders whose intent was to learn from the community members about the kind of education they preferred so that we can prepare preservice teachers to teach Native children effectively. Aliga responded as follows: "Sorry I misunderstood your intent. I have seen many researchers come to Indigenous people not to learn but to use us as 'guinea pigs'".

This ensuing communication between the researchers and participants proved the importance of establishing trusting relationships [73] between outside cultural groups and Native Peoples. For example, the data showed that, after establishing some trust, participants freely shared their experiences as colonized people and, therefore, recommended an education that addressed both the historical experiences of Native People and the positives that children bring to school. As outsiders and non-Native People, we benefited immensely from the established trusting relations. Equally instrumental was our ability to openly express our goal to gain essential cultural knowledge that we would then use as teacher educators to prepare more culturally aware future teachers. The following is an overview of the process we used to establish trusting relations with participants.

During the first meeting of the planned collaborative learning experience, we requested participants to introduce themselves and to ask all the questions they had about the planned research process. In addition to introducing themselves, all study participants shared their personal stories by responding to the following questions: Tell us who you are, what role do you play in your school/communities and your experiences? Discussions that ensued provided rich data regarding people's lived experiences. By openly sharing our backgrounds with participants, not just as teacher educators, but also our experiences as marginalized people of color and, hence, our intense interest in education for equity and justice, we were able to neutralize the apparent identity divide between us and participants. From that point, participants viewed us as allies (see endnote).

In general, participating in this collaborative Community-Based Professional Development program helped us as teacher educators to explore our held cultural assumptions. Although we identify as minoritized people, it became clear that some of our values were impacted by the mainstream education system. For example, we came into the study with the assumption that time and scheduling would be linear. Therefore, we expected everyone to arrive "on time". However, not all participants arrived on time because they had other morning matters to attend to, a reality that caused us to reflect on linear verse cyclical nature of time [71]. To many non-European cultures, time is not linear, with a start and end point [71]. Rather, it is event related. Therefore, reflecting on this cultural awaking, one researcher adjusted practice, as is evident in the except below.

> I had an assumption that participants would adhere to the agreed program schedule, including meeting times, and the list of invited guest-presenters. Thus, I experienced moments of confusion and contradictions when community members not only questioned the scheduled events and sequence, but also wanted to replace some speakers, apparently because of community social-cultural hierarchy. From this experience, I learned the value of collaboration and negotiation during scheduling phase. Also, I learned that cultural experts play prominent roles in matters concerning Indigenous Peoples (Sailor).

After recognizing held assumptions about time and events, both researchers reconsidered the process of scheduling events for the planned professional development activities by being flexible, and by consulting, negotiating, and collaborating with participants to establish agreeable times and schedules. Furthermore, the researchers learned that, generally, Native People considered time in contexts of building relationships, rather than completing scheduled events. In all, the data affirmed the importance of community-based experiential learning in teacher education.

Among other learning strategies, cultural immersion could easily aid in the process of gaining cultural knowledge and skills [42]. Therefore, while immersed in Native cultures, we had rich conversations and dialogues with Native America teachers and community members about the need to approach education for Native children differently because, currently, the American education systems is Eurocentric. Thus, it is not able to fully meet the learning needs of Indigenous and other minoritized leaners. Then, as teacher educators, we have a responsibility not only to develop a curriculum that is culturally responsive but also to model to preservice teachers' instructional strategies essential to effectively teaching all Native and other minorized learners. Therefore, based on the data, we concluded that community-based learning has the potential to support teachers, preservice teachers, and teacher educators in their journeys towards becoming culturally responsive educators.

Community-based learning provided the researchers an ideal space to appreciate the importance of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Culturally Responsive Schooling [62]. In our collaborative discussions with Indigenous teachers and community members, we were reminded of the many diversities withing a given community. Indeed, the growing diversity in classrooms worldwide requires educators to understand and attend to the needs of the fast-growing population of minoritized students. While students might come from one ethnic group, educators should never assume that learners learn the same way. Rather, they should seek to understand how different learners like to learn and then teach them accordingly. To that end, Dakota surmised the following:

> We must know that our Indigenous peoples are diverse, and there are many things we do the same, but there are many things we do differently. We also those who have mixed Tribal affiliations- where decedents are from two or more different Tribes. My father was from . . . tribe and my mother from. . .. tribe. My children have to navigate this dual heritage and dual citizenship.

Dakota's identity outlook is well supported in the literature. For example, some scholars have reported that although Indigenous People have near identical experiences as colonized people, they also have tribal-specific issues [18,23]. Therefore, in addition to considering various macro-issues plaguing Native People, educators should also examine and address micro-matters specific to different Native communities. Thus, as teacher educators, we need to have a clear understanding of tribal-specific histories so we can equip preservice teachers with pertinent knowledge and skills.

6. Discussion

We conducted this collaborative autoethnographic study to explore the perspective of Indigenous People on the best pedagogical practices for Native American learners. By using collaborative autoethnography, we developed insightful data to inform our professional practice. For example, the data showed that immersing teacher educators in diverse cultural communities creates ideal spaces to access various invisible aspects of cultural practices in a given community. Furthermore, the data showed that planning successful Community-Based Professional Development (CPD) and learning activities that benefit both participants and researchers is critical. Using a CPD model necessitated careful collaboration and negotiations with community cultural experts. The planning and implementation of a successful professional development cultural program is a collaborative effort. Furthermore, the findings from our study highlight the importance of applying principles of collaborative ethnography while planning Community-Based Professional Development programs. Collaborative autoethnography requires more than

observations. Rather, it invites both the researcher and researched to act as co-contributors and co-creators of learning. Through collaboration in this study, the data showed that the researchers and participants shared personal stories and held meaningful discussions that generated in-depth data from histories hidden within [47,49,51].

This current study demonstrates participants' preference for caring 4 pedagogy [64]. A caring education is implemented by caring educators who focus on the well-being of and "academic success of ethnically diverse students" [6] (p. 59). An education that is grounded in caring pedagogical principles is not only focused on establishing meaningful relations but is also interested in the general welfare of the learner [66]. Furthermore, other scholars contend [4,70] that a caring pedagogy is rooted in empathy and social justice [66]. Therefore, an education for care goes beyond the academics, and instead focuses on nurturing a sense of belonging, while questioning and redressing pertinent historical and contemporary injustices [4,68]. In essence, a caring pedagogy is culturally responsive in design and practice [68,69]. From this research experience, the data showed the importance of infusing culturally response teaching, both in teacher education programs and in school environments. To study participants, caring learning environments accept, understand, and appreciate diverse cultural norms and values and make the necessary efforts to establish connections between communities and school cultures. Although the frameworks of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS) offer similar views [4,24,25], a caring education is mainly interested in the general welfare of the learner. Considering that Indigenous students in America and elsewhere continue to experience a colonized education that is Euro-based, providing a caring education to Indigenous learners should be a priority. To make it possible, data from our study pointed to the need for teacher education programs to equip preservice teachers with the pedagogical knowledge and skills essential to teaching culturally diverse learners.

Other data revealed the importance of examining and addressing existing cultural assumptions that could easily influence the learning process. According to the data, participants preferred educators with the ability to examine the assumptions they held about Native Peoples. Among other detrimental assumptions, for example, is that of Indigenous students being solely cooperative vs. competitive [23,74]. This assumption was often used by the dominant culture as a justification for considering Indigenous learners naturally unable to function alone or to be self-sufficient, rather than a potential source of strength and a way to more fully address issues of concern to both individuals and communities [23,74]. Historically, this and other similar assumptions justified the injustice of sending Native children to boarding schools in the U.S. [70]. Therefore, it is critical for educators to always examine held assumptions. To that end, the researchers adopted the recommended process of self-examinations by reflecting on the assumptions they held about Indigenous People.

A thorough reflection revealed that, although members of historically marginalized groups themselves, the researchers held some views about Native People that mirrored the perspectives of the dominant group. For example, after careful reflexivity [73], the researchers developed essential consciousness to the assumption they held about time being linear. While time linearity is Eurocentric, most non-European cultures, including Native People, interact with time cyclically, that is, time does not have a start and end time [71]. Rather, it is event dependent [71,74]. Meanwhile, as teacher educators, the researchers used this collaborative autoethnography to support their professional development while immersed in a Native American community.

Although collaborative autoethnography provided the researchers with opportunities that are not available through the use of other methods, it is a research approach that is often associated with subjectivity. Notwithstanding the criticism, however, autoethnography could provide teacher educators with critical space for reflexivity [33–35]. Additionally, educators benefit from autoethnography because it helps them to understand the complexities of teaching. Thus, although autoethnography is potentially subjective, it is a rigorous qualitative methodology that puts the researchers' lived experiences as center

stage [12,39]. Finally, we acknowledge that this study might not be generalizable, as it is based on one context. However, the purpose of our study was not to generalize, because experiences are based on context. Rather, this inquiry was geared toward exploring the perspective of Native Peoples in a particular locale about best educational practices for Native American learners.

As teacher educators, this study enabled us to explore, collaboratively, the best ways to support to Native American learners. Understanding Native American cultures could create opportunities for teachers to become more culturally responsive. Therefore, considering the data from this current study, we conclude that education for culturally diverse learners should be informed by the frameworks of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS) to develop mastery of cultural competencies [4]. Further, an education founded on the principles of CRT and CRS requires teachers to develop self-awareness [30], to interrogate the views they hold about diversity [28,30] and to nurture culturally sustaining pedagogy [62]. Data from our study showed that an education that is culturally sustaining is not only contextually appropriate, but also listens to, and respects people's stories and histories. Additionally, it is collaborative and consultative. Therefore, data from this study recommends that teacher educators continually engage in opportunities that promote self-development related to cultural competency by working together, and in collaboration with communities. Finally, data revealed the need for teacher education programs to infuse in teaching and learning activities real life learning experiences to help preservice teachers master essential knowledge and skills in culturally responsive pedagogy.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, the data from our study support the following instructional practices:

- To meet the needs of diverse learners, teachers must continually seek to understand the communities in which they are located.
- It is important to create safe spaces in Community-Based Professional Development where everyone feels valued and can share stories openly without fear.
- Community-Based Professional Development (CPD) programs implemented in culturally diverse communities could help teachers and teacher educators develop skills in Culturally Responsive Teaching.
- Community-Based Professional Development is meaningful when participants are equal partners in developing activities on perceived needs [1].
- For Community-Based Professional Development, it is important to create trusting relationships where everyone feels valuated both as a researcher and participant.
- For Community-Based Professional Development to have an impact on teacher educators (and in-service teachers), it critical to address existing assumptions by consulting with respective community members.
- Be a respectful participant and active listener to community members who are the knowledge bearers of cultural traditions and norms that are important for supporting diverse learners.

Meanwhile, data form our study support the following essential pedagogical practices:

- Be knowledgeable about students' backgrounds. Native American children are diverse, just like the communities in which they come from.
- Establish and maintain positive relationships with communities from which learners come.
- Empower students by allowing them to share their personal stories. Stories do matter. Thus, allow learners to tell their family histories and personal stories.
- Infuse cultural practices and materials into the curriculum.
- Provide contextualized learning opportunities, such as community-based activities that are relevant to Native American students (and other marginalized learners).
- Ensure cultural congruity between home and classroom cultures.
- Invite multiple perspectives during instruction.

- Respect learners' home languages.
- Acknowledge and include diverse students' cultural identity.
- Develop equitable classroom practices and incorporate student cultures.
- Use differentiated instruction to allow all learning styles—use materials that represent diverse cultures.
- Establish classroom environment where learners feel respected and cared for.
- Affirm all learners.
- Create a positive home–school partnership.

Endnote:

Acknowledgement of our positionality to the Native Peoples

(A) We acknowledged that we are outsiders, and our workplace is located in the ancestral and traditional lands of. . .and many Native tribes who live in the Rocky Mountain area (our institution declaration). (B) Because of our identities, particularly ethnicity and language that differ from those of the dominant culture, we often face discrimination and stereotyping. (C) Teaching in a primarily White institution presented many challenges, such as microaggressions, frustrations, feelings of discomfort, isolation, and being othered. (D) Both teacher educators had family members who attended schools where they were in the minority and the school environments were not always positive or inclusive. (E) As people of color, we had personal concerns regarding the success pf Native American children and those form marginalized identities and therefore wanted to learn from Native teachers and community members' best practices that support the success of Native American learners.

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