

## Article

# Reclaiming Emotions: Re-Unlearning and Re-Learning Discourses of Healing in a Tribally Placed Doctoral Cohort

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**Abstract:** This article is a “talk story” among three Indigenous women who are connected in various ways but most recently through the heartwork of a tribal–university partnership for a tribally based doctoral cohort program. The first tribally based cohort includes representation of tribal nations from Washington State, Utah and New Mexico and all women. The contributors of this talk story include voices of a Muckleshoot partner who is an Indigenous education advocate and two Indigenous faculty members. We share our talk story in identifying the powerful connection of reclaiming emotions through the ability of centering Indigenous narratives, honoring culture and community, and the powerful role of place and space in honoring tribal sovereignty through its existence.

**Keywords:** tribally based education; Indigenous storywork; reclaiming emotions



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## Creation Story for the Muckleshoot Doctoral Cohort

Before we share the creation story for this 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 has signed both the Medicine Creek Treaty and the Point Elliott Treaty. The Muckleshoot Language is bəqəʃuɫucid. Muckleshoot tribal members have had various roles with the University of Washington (UW) over the past sixty years. Dr. Willard Bill, Sr., was the first Muckleshoot Tribal member to earn his doctorate at UW Seattle in 1978. Virginia Cross, long-time Muckleshoot Tribal Council member, who served as Chairperson for much of her tenure, earned her Master's Degree at UW Seattle in 1978. In 2012, Muckleshoot Tribal College and UWB (University of Washington Bothell), UWS (University of Washington Seattle), and UWT (University of Washington Tacoma) actively worked on developing a UW Master of Business Administration program to be held at Muckleshoot Tribal College (MTC). Although the program did not launch that year, it laid the foundation for future work. It is a cultural value to acknowledge the efforts of Native educators from the past, laying the foundation for the heartwork we are doing today.

In September 2020, a Muckleshoot Tribal College staff member, Amy Maharaj, reached out to the newly appointed Director of Educational Leadership Doctoral Program (Ed. D.) at the University of Washington Tacoma School of Education (UWT SOE) Dr. Robin Zape-tah-hol-ah Minthorn to request more information on the graduate programs. The director offered to go out to the Muckleshoot Tribal College to meet with Amy and Dr. Denise Bill, which led to 18 meetings between MTC and UWT SOE (and other offices) over the course of six months. The director expressed interest in bringing graduate programs to MTC as a way of solidifying the tribal-university partnership. The Ed. D. program being hosted at MTC ultimately became the focus of the partnership and collaboration between UWT SOE and MTC, of which Ashley Walker and Dr. Michelle Montgomery were an integral part of the formation. A Memorandum of Agreement was signed in February 2020 and

recruitment and admissions processes for the first MTC Ed. D. doctoral cohort would take place over the next few months. Program applicants included a group of fifteen women, most of whom were Indigenous. They all worked 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 COVID-19 pandemic all classes would have been held on Muckleshoot tribal lands.

## 1. Introduction

This article creates space for Indigenous communities, and especially Native women and doctoral students, to reflect on the healing process that took place when we centered Indigenous place-based learning (we will discuss this term and define what this means for us in the conclusion). We acknowledge as co-authors and collaborators in this heartwork<sup>1</sup> that we must tell the creation story of how the Muckleshoot doctoral cohort came to be and that we also must share our own stories in relation to Indigenous education. We will embed this article in the framework of Indigenous methodologies and storywork<sup>2</sup> to center our voices as Indigenous women and scholars. The healing we have seen unfold through the manifestation of this doctoral program at MTC has also allowed space for us to heal and for us to acknowledge the Indigenous education Elders<sup>3</sup> of whose shoulders we stand. We offer this with a good heart and with good intentions.

## 2. Our Stories in Relation to Indigenous Education

The following are reflexive pieces from us, the authors, to ground in our own connections to lived experiences of Indigenous education. Amongst the three of us, we have well over forty years of experience working in Indigenous education combined. We acknowledge that, for all of us, our work is centered in our Indigenous values, lived experiences, both good and bad, to make us stronger contributors in our heartwork. These are our stories that we share below.

*Denise:* Growing up in the 1960s and 70s, there was a lot of racism in school. As for Elementary School, I excelled as a student, but, being Native American at school was not really recognized very much. In 5th grade, I was taken outside by the teacher to discuss a history section in the textbook about God in relation to Native beliefs. I wanted to say the right thing so the teacher would let me go back inside, but, I was trying to stand up for my people as well. This was around the same time one of my best friend's said in response to what nationality I was, "Ewww, you're one of those dirty Muckleshoots?" In junior high at the local public schools the Fishing Wars were discussed and Native-looking students were grilled on their beliefs. Also, in junior high, there was a Native Club and that did make me feel good to belong to it. My parents were my support system and my Mom would often tell me to be proud of who I was and never let anyone make me feel ashamed of being Muckleshoot. These experiences as a young child are what motivated me to become a teacher. I wanted to support my people in their education and help become an advocate for Native people in education. I did not have the good fortune to take any Native studies courses in my college years. All three of my degrees were well planned out, focusing on the classes I needed to graduate. During my college years (1980s) was the time American Indian Studies Programs were starting to be built. It is a credit to the Native Educators from the 1960s to present, that we now have American Indian Studies Programs and classes at colleges and universities across the country.

<sup>1</sup> Heartwork will be defined later in the Our Hope for Healing section.

<sup>2</sup> We reference a term defined by Jo-ann Archibald in 2008.

<sup>3</sup> We will capitalize the term Elder throughout this manuscript to signify our respect and intention of honoring those who have created this space for Indigenous education.

*Michelle:* My understanding of education is a family legacy, involving “who” decides how to educate and for “whom”. I am a descendant of multiple generations of educators. My great Aunt Earlene and my father’s sister, Jenny, always reminded me that knowledge should not erase your identity nor should it encourage you to forget the hardships many have endured to redefine freedom. I was taught the responsibility of knowledge very early in life as well as the need to become well versed in both worlds. Being reared in North Carolina, the reality of being raced and erased are a lived experience, in particular as a brown mixed-race Indigenous female. Although I have numerous racialized experiences, my commitment to continue to redefine freedom in the form of decolonized education has always been through the support of a multi-generation of educators in my family. Their gift of empowerment directly lies in the living breath from re-shared stories of segregation, the inability to attend predominantly white schools, the violence towards members of my family when schools were integrated. The path of healing began with education. In all of my lessons learned navigating the harsh realities of secondary and post-secondary education, I always heard my grandfather words “No matter what this life brings you...know your people will always be with you.” I wholeheartedly believe that all Indigenous educational experiences should be filled with empowerment through identity, family and safe spaces but most importantly reminders, “. . . know your people will always be with you.”

*Robin:* I grew up in the 1980s and 1990s, and one would think that racism would have gotten better by then. But, I grew up knowing I was different. I knew I was different when I hung out with some white (so-called) friends and one of them told me that I was dirty because I had darker elbows and knees. I also remember in seventh grade on the bus to school there was a white boy who would ridicule me and tell me my face looked like a skeleton because I had high cheekbones. I decided after this year of school to transfer from a bigger school district to a more rural one where more Native American students were and live with my grandparents. It was then that I would learn that my own grandmother grew up in a boarding school. She started at the age of five and went there almost all of her schooling, except two years. She graduated from Haskell in Lawrence, KS. Years later, my mother would attend the same smaller public school and get ridiculed on the bus and called “squaw”. She decided to transfer to Chilocco boarding school in New Kirk, OK to escape the racism and be around more Native students. My dad would decide in Oregon to transfer from his public school to Chemawa boarding school in Salem, OR to escape the border town racism he experienced. Now, I have aunts and uncles who are Native educators working in public schools and my husband is a Native educator. It amazes me that our families have this complex history and connection to Western educational systems. I am grateful to be a part of reclaiming and Indigenizing higher education now.

These shared lived experiences and connections to Indigenous education have inspired us to acknowledge our beginnings. We learn from our lived experiences and acknowledge the work of the Elders before us who shaped what Indigenous education will look like for future generations. We acknowledge the Elders who have laid the groundwork for us to be where we are today with this partnership for Indigenous education in the Northwest.

### **3. Muckleshoot Tribal College: Elders of Tribally-Based Education**

The Muckleshoot Tribal College (MTC) is a full-service learning center. Although not an accredited institution at this time, we have developed strategic partnerships with accredited institutions to provide our students with a broad range of programming, from general education diplomas (GEDs) to Master’s Degrees. Most recently, we have entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Washington Tacoma, to offer

the Educational Leadership Program Doctorate Degree, with a focus on Native American Educational Leadership in 2020.

The Muckleshoot Tribal College is a tribally directed education leader, promoting life-long learning and the power to choose post-secondary and higher education pathways. Through strategic partnerships, we create a culturally inspiring environment that expands academic and career opportunities for our immediate tribal family and extended community. In 1995, the Muckleshoot Tribal Council passed a resolution to create a center for Higher Education. In 1997, the Muckleshoot Tribal Council renamed the center for Higher Education to the Muckleshoot Tribal College. In 2001, the term “Seamless Pathway” was introduced. Various Muckleshoot tribal members have served in leadership roles at Muckleshoot Tribal College: Dr. Willard Bill, Sr. (2000–2002); Wilma Cabanas (2002–2017), and currently Michele Rodarte (2018–present), and Dr. Denise Bill. (2017–present). Community members, Jim Egawa (2002–2004) and Joseph Martin (2002–2004), also served in leadership efforts at the Muckleshoot Tribal College. The Muckleshoot Scholarship Department was created approximately in 1997 by several Muckleshoot tribal members, with Virginia Cross spearheading this. Since 1997, over 400 Muckleshoot tribal members have earned higher education degrees as a result of the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe Scholarship Department (Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, personal communication, 9 October 2020). We acknowledge these Elders of Muckleshoot Tribal Education as essential to creating space for where we are today. Without their heartwork and tireless efforts, we would not be sharing these stories today.

#### 4. Methods of Indigenous Talk Storywork

##### 4.1. Overview

In this section, we provide an overview of the Indigenous methodologies and frameworks that are centered this article and heartwork. We want to first acknowledge Muckleshoot tribal education Elder, Dr. Willard Bill a Muckleshoot Indian Tribe member who was one of the first doctoral recipients from the University of Washington. He later became a professor and known for Indigenous educational leadership in the state. He provided a framework on the sacred circle and how to heal it. We then acknowledge Dr. Bryan Brayboy (2006) and the foundations that were laid with Tribal Critical Race theory explicitly connecting to tenets 4, 5, 6 and 7 that address tribal sovereignty and acknowledge the unique status we hold as Indigenous peoples in relation to government and in relation to ancestral teachings and beings. Lastly, we highlight the indelible heartwork of Dr. Jo-ann Archibald (2008) and the grounding she brings into the Indigenous framework of Indigenous storywork. The use of Elders, ancestral teachings and storying our connections to place, concepts and being is at the center of how we present this article and heartwork on the pathway to healing, reclaiming, and centering Indigeneity.

##### 4.2. Breaking the Sacred Circle

Breaking the Sacred Circle (Bill 1987) is a curriculum used by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, from the late 1980s to present, designed for secondary teachers to implement. It was to serve as a “springboard for student discussion of American Indian issues” (Bill 1987). This article covers: The Sacred Circle, Intrusion, Spiritual Confusion, Acquisition, Justification, Dissolution, Exclusion, Lack of harmony, Cultural Disintegration, and a call for Natives to heal the Sacred Circle. Bill (1987) says, “to have lived for thousands of years on the North American Continent is a testimony to the Indian’s ability to maintain a balance between the physical, mental, spiritual, and cultural aspects of life” (p. 1). Bill (1987) goes on to say, “the goal of the traditional Indian was to strike a harmonious balance with nature and not to attempt to control it” (p. 1). The Sacred Circle represents four components: Mental, Cultural, Spiritual, and Physical. This article goes on to say, “American Indian-Alaskan Native cultures were cooperative societies that depended on each facet of their environment for sustenance” (p. 4). Further, “there was a need to interrelate for survival, and, this need was passed on through the centuries” (p. 4).

Bill (1987) lays out how the U.S. Government wrote, promoted, and enforced policies to disrupt the Native American way of life. One example of disruption of the Sacred Circle was creating the reservation system, taking people from their traditional lands where Natives hunted, fished, gathered berries, roots, plants, and moved Natives to pieces of land called reservations. Bill (1987) goes into greater depth about the significance of the land being sacred and outlines many facts of how the Sacred Circle was broken. The conclusion in this article states that Natives have survived. Native children are being taught respect for the land. Native Tribes are reclaiming the reservations that were once meant for harm. Bill (1987, p. 49) concludes with using Elkin's term "contra-acculturation", stating it "takes place when the culture physically survives contact with alien cultures and revives its culture in a modified form", which provides hope for the survivors of the breaking of the Sacred Circle. He goes on to provide an example from the Seneca's and Alaskan Native's villages of repairing the Sacred Circle through teachings of the ancestors, re-establishment of culture, health, and spirituality. The principles of the Sacred Circle were used in our interpretation and analysis of our storying and the overarching approach to the conceptualization of reclaiming emotions.

#### 4.3. Tribal Critical Race Theory

Tribal Critical Race Theory, of which there are several tenets, is both a method and methodology to uplift tribal sovereignty (Brayboy 2006). Tenets four-six are of particular relevance in our analysis of experiences of the Ed. D. program at MTC. Tenet four states that Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification (Brayboy 2006). Tenet five states that the concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens (Brayboy 2006). Lastly, tenet six states that governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation (Brayboy 2006). It is imperative to unveil that the social constructs of oppression have very real effects that are cultural, psychological and material. The systematic mistreatment of Indigenous peoples occurs when institutionalized practices systematically reflect and produce inequalities based on one's race group membership. Tribal Critical Race Theory reinforces the need for anti-racist and anti-colonial ideas and actions to acknowledge sovereignty as a discursive cultural practice through stories of lived experiences. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups (Brayboy 2006).

#### 4.4. Indigenous Storywork

Indigenous storywork as articulated by Archibald (2008) is a way of weaving our teachings and cultural beliefs into stories that are translated through oral and written ways. She reminds us that we have the power to use 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 (Archibald 2008). The principles that were a central part of connecting our stories were respect (for each other's stories), responsibility (for those who came before us), reverence (for the land and space we are living within), inter-relatedness (connecting our stories together), and synergy (how we envision the future). Indigenous storywork verifies the need for our stories and provides space in the places we navigate, such as academic and Western spaces.

### 5. Our Talk Story

As we began brainstorming through how to approach and share what we were seeing in the power and healing of an Indigenous place-based doctoral cohort, we thought the most intentional and authentic way to present this would be through a talk story. We

recognized that the original way many of our tribal communities have learned is through the telling of stories and those stories being carried on. So, we approached our talk story as a way of processing what we saw taking place within this Indigenous doctoral program. What manifested from our stories was how it is also a healing space for us as faculty and directors of tribal education programs. We share our talk story below and found five themes and subsections that emerged through our conversation. They are (1) reclaiming emotions, (2) my grandmother held my hand, (3) healing the wounds in our experiences, (4) honoring our Indigenous education Elders, and (5) dreams for the future.

### *5.1. Talk Story Process and Procedures*

The process for our talk story took place over the course of two conversations. We chose to use this storytelling approach as a way of sharing a conversation in relation to the impact of this tribally-based cohort. We felt this approach was more manageable to share collectively while respecting the time of each person who, during the COVID-19 pandemic, were navigating multiple roles and responsibilities. In the time between the first and second sessions, we each wrote down our stories and connections to Indigenous education. We used Zoom for each session recording and used the transcription feature to produce verbatim transcripts. We looked over the transcripts to make edits. We had a second session to talk through our previous talk story and identified the themes we saw arising. We also talked through what would add to our talk story, such as providing our program's creation story as well as honor those Elders who came before us in connection to tribal education. Once this was complete, each author looked through the manuscript for clarification and modifications, as needed. This was our process and way of using a talk story approach that was collective and intentional to honor our voices and share our lived experiences.

### *5.2. Reclaiming Emotions*

In this section, we talk through navigating emotions and the inherent teachings that have come with settler colonialism. We began moving through understanding the healing power that this tribally based doctoral cohort was having on the students and on us as we supported and taught in the program.

**Robin:** Well, we have reclaiming emotions. Are you learning and relearning this course of healing in a tribally based doctoral cohort?

**Denise:** It is important for those of us in education to work on reclaiming our emotions.

**Robin:** Terms people like using is "social emotional intelligence" and all of that. Even though, we know we've already had that way of being before that term was used.

**Michelle:** Yes, I think, for our paper that we should unpack what emotional capital is?

**Denise:** Great.

**Michelle:** So, I was just thinking about that the other day, what is emotional capital. You have cultural capital, right? And, then there's also emotional. I mean, it could be a part of cultural capital. I don't know. I think that's what's missing in the western paradigm right is this whole concept of, you know, one you're taught not to have emotions. Right. So how do we do this in a learning environment? From a cultural lens, bring in the emotional context.

**Denise:** Yes, because I've noticed in my own work that it is hard to find the time to balance the Sacred Circle. I was taught the value of work, which I am grateful for, but often there was not time to balance other areas.

**Michelle:** Right, right.

**Denise:** And, then now like the “20 somethings” and “30 somethings” all want to talk about all these great, wonderful, beautiful ways of working and teaming together and being in touch with ourselves. I’m all for that right but it’s like there’s a disconnect because I have 30 years of just work, work, work, because that’s what my parents taught me; that’s what our parents and our grandparents did for survival. I’m just doing what I was taught, and, of course, working hard is a traditional Native value. The younger generation seems to be more in touch with their emotions than previous generations. It is time for all generations to work together to lift each other up and encourage one another. In administration, there are many things that one is up against: deadlines, helping students, projects, returning emails, supervisors, etc. Also, people are on the continuum of their careers and depending on where you are at in your career, you may have more or less responsibility; it becomes a balancing act. My father always taught me to take time to talk with people and this remains an important goal of mine.

**Michelle:** It does. And, it’s a strong lens of justice. Right. So, it’s coming from this whole thing of what is emotional reciprocity right? So I agree, because even the generation behind you, that would be Robin and I, you know, there’s still that hesitancy of how do we do what we do? And, without being viewed as females, as being these emotional beings that can’t be professional. The Western paradigm, I think in a learning environment has placed a very negative overtone that being emotional as a sign of weakness.

**Denise:** Right. Yes.

**Michelle:** And then for Indigenous peoples in the Western world, we are always put in a position to be seen and not heard. Right. And, I would say that in, you know, a prime example, it’s very racially polarized. But, we have the Black Lives Matter movement, which people are seeing here front and center. I just feel that some of the things that we do with us as Indigenous peoples, it’s not up in your heart; it’s not blown up to the point where there’s this huge support around it. Right. And, so it goes back to “kill the Indian in him and save the man”. Right. So how do we unlearn that?

### 5.3. *My Grandmother Held My Hand*

The title of this section comes from the power we saw in our family members who directly experienced trauma but still have the capability to love and to dream for better futures for our communities and themselves. This was a powerful way of seeing our resilience moving through generations.

**Robin:** I’m with what you and Denise are saying it’s a generational thing. It’s a survival thing. But I think there’s also that disconnection. But there’s a healing component that’s happening right now where the younger generation is able to have feelings, unable to connect. So I think about that. It’s really odd because my grandma actually grew up in a boarding school from the age of five until she graduated high school and she went to public school two years out of her schooling. But, for some reason, she was a very loving person. So, I felt like she always told us she loved us. She was wanting to hold our hands. I feel like that’s outside of the norm of people that had that experience because others have become cold and have become more less connected to that part. I feel like then there was my mother who was not very, don’t want to say caring, but not very expressive in her emotions. So now, I’m in this place with my daughter where I’m telling her, I love her like probably every five minutes or every 30 minutes or something. I’m constantly telling her that and I’m always giving her hugs and love because (not that I ever questioned my mom) but that it wasn’t overtly expressed. I know a part of that is us losing that parental aspect of parenting in a boarding school so I know that’s a piece of it, too.

**Denise:** Yeah, that could be the title of the article, “My grandmother held my hand”.

**Michelle:** Oh, wow and then reclaiming emotions that we are unlearning and relearning in a tribally based doctoral cohort. I think it would be really great if we could capture a story, a story like that in the very beginning. Just talk about the different experiences of being educated. It’s really powerful. In my classes, I always ask students to bring their whole selves. It’s my practice because in all of my degrees I was never given a safe space to bring my whole self even with Native faculty. I think we also carry historic trauma genetically; there’s something in us that makes us more anxious. I think this is why we should share exactly what we’re doing and why it’s important.

**Denise:** Well, I know my dad when he was a Director of Education for the state of Washington in the 1980’s he wrote *Breaking the Sacred Circle*. It talks about how we were colonized. He said, “You know, the U.S. government isolated Native people.” He pointed out that this was the government’s strategy, to take away their children, put them on reservations. It was meant in a bad way. Now, of course as Native people we are reclaiming our reservations and making them positive environments. We survived. Isolation, my dad talked about in his curriculum, is how we were colonized. When I read *Breaking The Sacred Circle* for the first time around 2008, I felt like my Dad was speaking to me. He made a call for action in this document, the call for the 21st century for Native people to heal their reservations, heal their tribes, heal their families, and to heal themselves. My Dad uses the sacred circle that we’re all familiar with. This article comforted me; my Dad was a wise man.

#### 5.4. *Healing the Wounds in Our Experiences*

Here, we talk about powerful experiences of examples of ancestors showing themselves to us in educational spaces through animal beings or through a spirit’s presence. We also discussed our lived experiences in navigating lateral violence and hard experiences, which we have seen transform into healing opportunities and spaces.

**Robin:** Yeah, I was thinking about how Michelle was talking about the experience of graduate education or education in general and how it becomes like I don’t want to say contested space, but a space where we also are re-experiencing trauma. This cohort, I think, has an opportunity and the ability to create a safe healing space. One of the things that I’ve heard is that these classes are better than my therapy sessions. Michelle have you heard this in your classes? I don’t know if it’s a good thing (some people may not look at it as a good thing) that they’re able to share and connect not only to our readings, but also to their personal experience. They share in the classroom context and with each other; they feel safe enough to do that. It’s one of the things that I think that I’ve heard from students from their perspective. I just can’t imagine how much more powerful that would be to be in a classroom together and to be on tribal lands and do that. I just think right now it’s powerful, but can you imagine how much more powerful that would be to be able to have our classes at Muckleshoot and to be able to experience that together? I just think that that’s going to make it much more of a healing space. I don’t know the history of Muckleshoot Tribal College (or at least the historical evolution of the land it sits on) but I was thinking of Pawnee. I used to teach at the tribal college in Oklahoma and they actually had a boarding school there on the reservation on their land. They created one of their buildings that was from the boarding school and is now their tribal college. So, I was just thinking of how powerful that is that they created this space that was meant to harm them that became a healing space for them. So just thinking about what that means and that their ancestors would show up. I don’t know if you all

have this at all in your building, but you could hear movement. I heard it when I was teaching there during those two years. I was never scared because I didn't think there were ill intentions. I think it was just them sharing their presence was there with us. I don't know what that has looked like for Muckleshoot Tribal College and if that has ever come up. We have ancestors that are kind of making their presence known or felt.

**Denise:** I definitely I've had that experience. My dad worked here at Muckleshoot Tribal College around 2000. My dad started his career with Muckleshoot and came back near the end of his career to work with Muckleshoot. My dad had an office in the same building that the college is currently in. So, one day, not too long ago I went right outside to my car and this eagle kind of swooped down and it went right past me. It came very close. I felt like that was my dad. My dad is watching over me. I think others here in the building have that experience as well. I think this cohort is so exciting because it's all of these things that we are all talking about, these educational healing spaces. The Native women in our UWT/MTC cohort do want to lift everybody up. Native women, like all people, carry different things and sometimes there are clashes. However, it seems like people today are more willing to try and work things out with each other and work in a good way together.

**Michelle:** Yeah, I think that resonates because remaining and becoming right. So how do you stay true to yourself, evolve to healing and become who you were meant to be? I think this cohort does that, it defines quite a bit. I think an important component to include, which makes this unique is that this cohort started in a pandemic. Also, and in the epicenter of racialized violence and then all of that, it triggers me, because I grew up watching the Klu Klux Klan. I grew up just knowing the possibilities. So, when all these things are happening, it triggers me like all these things trigger me to hear people use certain words where I work, or to act a certain way. I'm not saying racism isn't everywhere, but in the South it's really projected in your face. It's quite hateful. I think for the women that we have, it's an older cohort except for a couple more mature cohort members. I think there's an amount of power there, [they say] "if she can do it, I can do it". There is a kind of virtual camaraderie that's happening. It's beautiful to see because there's an extreme of generations. You've got one of the older cohort members all the way down right to the younger students from Lummi so it's really multi-generational which makes it so unique. The multi-generational healing. So to hear a student say "I was taught not to cry. I wish I could cry", thank you for crying—that's powerful. The whole process of "I can't be too vulnerable" I think is the right focus. It's healing, a place of healing, and it's a journey.

**Robin:** I think what's powerful about that is that all of us I think each of us has maybe experienced lateral violence or some form of lateral violence. I have experienced it in my own community. You know, I worked at our tribal college in Oklahoma. I was not from that tribe, but a tribe close to it, and I grew up around that community my whole life and you're either from my tribe, that tribal community or a combination so that was my community. I wanted to work in our tribal college. When I got there, I was really surprised at the amount of lateral violence that I saw; some people were harmful. I was really shocked because I had a man who was my mentor who looked out for me. When he left, an older tribal college employee sat me down and said okay now I'm going to tell you this and put you in your place. There was intentional infliction of harm and I had to leave that place. I could have stayed but I would have been in an abusive environment and I chose to leave. It's really hard to say because then they ended up asking me to come back and do stuff for them. Of course, I still did because I

love my community, but I wasn't going to inflict harm on myself on a daily basis. I think now we're creating these spaces where we cannot replicate that harm, but we can create these healing spaces where we can lift each other up and support each other.

**Michelle:** For me, my lived experience with lateral violence also included having a colleague tell me, "I'm the good Indian and you are bad. You should look for another job". For me, it is important in a classroom regardless of race and ethnicity, to make sure that every student feels safe. I ask them to bring their whole selves. Lateral violence is real. It is more hurtful because it's our own people. You have a higher expectation that it would be like "we're all in this together". We've all seen it. We've all experienced it but I think for this cohort because they come from so many walks of professionalism, they've also experienced lateral violence. I noticed on the first day of class that they were a little bit resistant about how to share and what to share. And then when we met again, it was just all flowing. When you read their online discussions, you can see that they're really engaging and finding new ways to communicate which I think is really powerful. I think that the healing part is to have a multi-generational cohort. It is important to have a safe space. Like when students, they can resubmit. Sure, let's talk about what that would look like.

**Denise:** Yeah, right. Well, there's a lot of elitism in academia. For Natives, one of the ways we were colonized was through education—taking children and putting them in boarding schools. Education was one of the main ways our Sacred Circle broke. It wasn't that long ago that there was so much blatant racism, even in the schools. When I was a little girl in Auburn, there was racism in the schools. I did well because I was a good student and I had light skin. But inside, I knew who I was. It was a difficult time here to be Muckleshoot. They used to say terrible things about Muckleshoot 40, 50, 60 years ago, terrible. Of course, in 2020 the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe is economically prosperous so many things have changed for the better. For example, the Muckleshoot Tribe has a state-of-the-art Wellness Center, clinic, and, one of the best behavior health programs in the state. It's good to have Native people in our cohort. You guys are both at UWT right. I mean, it's just like, fantastic but I think sometimes it doesn't feel fantastic for you guys because you have to fight all those battles.

**Michelle:** Yeah. They'll just look at it as being petty, they will just . . .

**Denise:** Yeah, you know but that's not okay.

**Michelle:** Yeah, I don't play in the gray or black or white, I call a spade a spade. It's wrong if it's wrong. I don't want to be bothered with it. I think that some people who haven't grown up with the school of hard knocks, like I did, don't realize that you can't play both sides of the fence or it'll come back and bite you every time. So, either you're there for your people or you're not and that's just my walk of life, but I'm okay with that. I know that that won't be the first time that someone calls me "the bad Indian" because I am outspoken. When you're brown on our campus, a minority, and speak out it's just this hyper anxiety. I'm used to it. I'm not going to stop speaking my mind. I'll be professional about it. I would say I have always been reminded that people died for me to be where I am today. So, when you talk about ancestors showing up and feeling them when you're talking that's powerful. For our students to feel comfortable to cry virtually and share virtually, "I'm going through this, I'm going through that", it is something that I did not experience in graduate school. I just didn't and so I'm happy because they're happy. They feel safe to be in the space to do that even virtually. If we are that emotional and connected virtually, imagine what that would look like if we were on your home territory and potlucking and learning

at the same time. It will be an unbreakable bond . . . then for the kids to see that, then the community members to see that—it's just healing all around.

**Denise:** It's a new way of these different generations, being able to work together. For our parents, and grandparents, the way they protected themselves from the US government was to not show emotion and to work hard so that's what they tried to pass down to us. Right. So you know my generation, we think "WORK HARD, WORK HARD, WORK HARD," that's the natural emotion. Definitely that really was striking to me when you said, "ask for help". Wow. I mean, I think most of my life I never heard something like that, you know, ask for help, but that's so powerful. I think it's our responsibility to also communicate this to the younger ones so that they know. It's funny because during this COVID time I joined a Zoom support group; every Saturday morning I'm with that group of ladies. In this group we're mainly talking, expressing ourselves. However, it is helpful because I know every Saturday, no matter what's happened through the week, I can go on to that Zoom meeting and I can find support. I am not isolating. I am reaching out to others. I can hear other's stories.

**Robin:** I think with this cohort that the healing process of sharing and understanding who we are and being able to verbalize that or write about it was in the healing process at the beginning of our cohort. At the end, they're going to be much stronger leaders and educators, whatever role they're taking on in their community or in their families being able to create that cycle of healing for other people. That's something that I think is going to be a powerful piece by us being able to have Native faculty and Native instructors teaching our classes. Where we want to honor Indigenous readings or Indigenous scholarship. Of course, you may have other readings, but we want to make sure that their perspectives are being centered as opposed to being an add on. We're not less than anybody or anything. Be the center. We deserve to be recognized and visibilized in our curriculum and our way of learning. I think that none of us have had that experience in our doctoral degrees or education so to be able to provide that for other people I think is going to be powerful. For them, that's going to be the expectation that they set on others, like their families.

**Michelle:** It's something that is so missing in every conversation that I've had with people, whether it's via text, whether it's on the phone, or it's virtual. It's all generations that are yearning like they want it, they need it. I think this stillness that we're in is really bringing that to the surface that people are having to sit with themselves and figure out what they need to work on. You have to in order for us to survive COVID. We do have to learn to sit with ourselves. For me, it is about being a forever student. I'm always checking in. I just send an email to check in with students. I think it's important to be able to have that safe space. I think of my grandparents and my great grandparents if I feel unsafe in the present. I cannot imagine the violence that could have been projected on them with no repercussions whatsoever. It is important to express your emotions in healthy ways. You're in the right kind of space.

**Robin:** I think one of the things that I have tried is using terminology heartwork. Right. So, I've noticed a lot of the students, not just in our Muckleshoot cohort but in our other cohorts are using that word too. The reason that I use that term is because it's a connection back to the emotional piece of who we are. It's okay, whatever your heart is passionate about, or whatever your heart is connected to—you can connect your work back. It's okay to have that connection as opposed to disconnected in your work. For me, if I'm disconnected from my work, then I'm also not being authentic to who I am. So, I think that further, I hope that for the students that they know everybody has a passion in life, whatever their areas, they're passionate about it. It's also giving them the opportunity to create

a deeper connection to that and to give them the tools to be able to make it even stronger and give them the tools to be able to make those connections.

**Michelle:** I agree. I think the practice, to this cohort, is bringing their whole selves. Slowly feeling safe in this space. I think this is trial and error for them right now. Like, how much I can bring and how much, while feeling healthy enough to bring forward? I think of my great grandma. She went to school many years ago to be educated, like all of them. Most of my relatives went to college, my great aunt was excited that it is all Native women. This program is creating positive change. The act of reclaiming yourself, we are recreating self-determination but emotional self-determination in a safe place to learn. Being emotional should be safe and not judged as negative.

**Robin:** Yeah, I do think it's a unique experience because I know many of my colleagues here working in higher education or even Native Studies that are still functioning in a place where we don't have full reign. We still have that full ownership but that full embodiment of who we are being able to be authentic to it. We're still having to balance out functioning in a Western world. I think here because of the space that has been created that it's that authenticity that's there and the ability to be free.

**Michelle:** Imagine if the master's program was developed under the same cost of this template? At some point, there will be an Indigenous Studies program that overlays and education. Imagine how powerful that would be to have this sort of transition from undergraduate to masters or doctoral cohort. Absolutely powerful, but I would say the difference would be that it has to be in the community. It needs to be out of the institutional infrastructure; these sort of programs should be created in the community.

**Denise:** Our cohort is an example of all different tribes. Education is such a positive thing, a step forward. The Native women in this program are going to do great things. It will be exciting to watch over the next 20 years what these women are going to accomplish!

**Michelle:** Emotional capital . . . . Western institutionalized spaces erase and do not acknowledge emotional capital. The reason why is because our emotional capital does not uplift colonization but expresses the historical harms. Reclaiming the layers of emotional and cultural capital is important to succeed in any learning environment. It is also important to acknowledge spirituality within healthy spaces.

**Denise:** I think that this cohort is part of the work that my dad and other dads and moms were talking about healing the sacred circle. We're doing it now. We're reclaiming that emotional capital.

**Michelle:** I think the difference in an Indigenous cohort is how culture and traditions are embraced but from a multidisciplinary lens. The key is the development of an extended family. This is about family. It all goes back to the word family. There's a difference. We are actively decolonizing a doctoral program framework and simultaneously growing a family. The work of growing a family by unlearning and relearning how to bring our whole selves, so that we can be healthy to lead our communities. I think that's very powerful.

### *5.5. Honoring Our Indigenous Education Elders*

In this section, we thought it was important to highlight the discussion of honoring Indigenous education Elders whose work has carved a pathway for us. In some of our cultural traditions, we do this through giving food to spirits and ancestors who have moved on before or after a meal. For others, it might mean acknowledging them orally before an

event takes place. We want to acknowledge the importance of the ancestral presence and responsibility that we have in working in Indigenous education.

**Robin:** Yeah, I agree. I just wanted to mention or go back to it. Denise was saying about your father and what others have done. I'm going to acknowledge that their work is what built us up to this point. We're only here because of them and their work. Maybe they didn't see it come to fruition but now they're seeing it in a different way. They're not physically here, but they're spiritually here. So, I think that that's something that I always think about what our heartwork is for, like my grandmother's boarding schools experience. I have a responsibility to create a better world for her because she survived or my great grandmother who died early when my grandmother was two and didn't have a full life. I have a responsibility to have a full life and to do the best I can to make something better for other people. I just want to acknowledge our ancestors and those that have worked in education, Native Education; we're here because of them.

**Denise:** Beautiful. Thank you for your words. Many Native organizations and think tanks take the time to remember our relatives that have come before us in Indian Education. They did this formally and informally. It always kept those people alive with us. I love that.

#### 5.6. *Dreams for the Future*

We want to recognize that it is important for us to constantly evolve and grow in our tribally based doctoral program and in the heartwork of building Indigenous education programs through this partnership. In this section, we begin discussion dreams for the future in this tribal–university collaboration.

**Michelle:** My experiences were being emotionally rubbed raw in my graduate programs and as a Senior Fellow with a PhD. This program should become a satellite model for other people to really consider investing in healthy and safe learning spaces.

**Denise:** I think so too. I really do. I know my daughter. She doesn't have her Master's yet and she was like, "can we just get my masters and do this?" She wanted to be in this cohort so bad because it's all Native people and plus, I told her all these great things about both of you. I said, no, you have to get your Master's first and so she's one of the ones waiting for us to build the Master's program.

**Michelle:** It would be great if there was a way to guarantee seats for people from the Master's program into the doctoral cohort. Perhaps an early admission depending on a student's progress in the Master's program.

**Denise:** Yeah, that's a really good idea and then the concern I have is what's the masters going to be in. What major? Is it going to be in business? That is one of the top areas of interest.

**Robin:** Yeah, and I think as you potentially move in that direction to start thinking about what that looks like, what is the structure. But also, where the most support could be or even where it could be if there's an opportunity for different degree areas and for them to work together. It's a great idea for an interdisciplinary Master's degree. I think that can be something that could be considered because we have education people that are interested, and you have business, then you have counseling and social work. How could we all work together to create this degree?

**Michelle:** An Interdisciplinary Master's degree would be amazing. I know UWT has had an interdisciplinary Master's degree, but it is not structured to support the mission of an Indigenous-focused program.

With the intentions of this Indigenous storywork approach, we are bridging the connections of tribal sovereignty and the sacred circle in hopes of healing and reclaiming our emotions within this tribally based doctoral cohort. In a very circular approach, we shared in our talk story the evolution of reclaiming emotions, the emphasis of resiliency through “my grandmother held my hand”, healing from our experiences, honoring our Indigenous education Elders, and dreaming for the future. There are ebbs and flows of reclamation and imagining what is yet to come. With that in mind, we are sharing two areas that are essential in building a foundation for this heartwork that include defining and decolonizing terms and providing context and suggestions for building Indigenous and place-based curriculum.

## 6. Conclusion: Indigenous and Place-Based Curriculum and Coursework

“It is important as university or college faculty and programs in educational leadership that we acknowledge place as central to our Indigenous communities. This means that students who we hope to recruit into our programs who are Native American and serve their own or a Native American school or university are invested in centering the community within the development of teachers, staff, and programming to serve students and families. Therefore, our role is to advocate how we develop reciprocal relationships with tribal nations and broader Native American communities within our curriculum.” (Minthorn 2020, p. 63)

Honoring place is the first step that institutions can begin to do to build tribal and university partnerships. Honoring place means knowing the history from the Tribe’s perspective and building reciprocal relationships with them. As we transition from honoring to building a tribally-responsive curriculum, it becomes a long-term relationship to understand the needs of tribal communities and how the institution can collaboratively envision and cultivate these types of programs. In order for healing spaces to be created, there must first be a commitment to honoring place and to doing whatever it takes to bridge academic programs that can be taught on tribal lands. This praxis and shift in responsibility and reciprocity can be a framework for Indigenizing educational leadership programs and curriculum. These healing spaces and reclamation of emotion have the opportunity to engender heartwork and Indigenous leadership that will touch future generations after we are no longer here, when we become the Indigenous Elders and ancestors.

One of the lessons from both the COVID-19 pandemic and methods such as talk story is creating human interaction. In this time where we have had time to sit with ourselves and be physically separated from our relatives, communities, and ceremonies, we have been able to reflect on, and continue, the healing process for future generations.

## 7. Redefining and Decolonizing Terms

In this section, we provide definitions to terms used within the talk story and ensure that readers can take away terminology that can be used within their scholarship and praxis. As Indigenous scholars and practitioners, we have a responsibility to continue to create space and Indigenize a lexicon that honors who we are in our worldviews.

### 7.1. Indigenous Talk Story Method

Indigenous talk story is a method that recognizes the authenticity of voicing or story-telling which is grounded and historically influenced by lived experiences and place-based knowledge. It is a powerful way of speaking life to words that can be shared between generations and communities.

### 7.2. Heartwork

“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 self-

less and passionate to help benefit those whom we hold close to our hearts.” (Minthorn 2018, p. 32)

### 7.3. Emotion Reclamation

Emotion reclamation is the act of giving ourselves permission to feel and be within our emotions. As Indigenous peoples, we have been taught to be cold and not to feel anything due to the federal policies and historical trauma our ancestors and families have experienced. In pushing against those teachings that have been ingrained in our communities and families, we are allowing ourselves to feel and express emotions within the classroom and contexts we normally would not. We do this in honor of our ancestors' survival and prayers for us.

### 7.4. Indigenous Leadership

Indigenous leadership is pushing against the colonial construct of leadership in which there is one person who is the leader and the system is hierarchical. Instead, Indigenous leadership is a way of honoring our values as Indigenous peoples and to acknowledge that we have ancestral and community responsibilities and that our roles are not siloed rather they are interconnected to everyone and reliant on many to transform and move our communities forward (Minthorn and Chavez 2015).

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