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"Why Don't We Try Something New?" How Indigenous Educators Supported One Another in *Leaning Toward* in Community-Based Inquiry

Amanda LeClair-Diaz

The scissors glided smoothly around the laminated shapes, like a jet soaring in a cloudless sky. Be careful not to cut into the shape, *I thought to myself. I focused on sitting still and not bouncing my leg to ensure my cut lines were straight. I could hear the satisfying, sharp whisper of scissors slicing through lamination next to me. My lead teacher piled up her half of the laminated shapes near the edge of her desk.*

Halfway through. *I lay the scissors next to my pile of shapes.* Fifteen more minutes until I pick up the kids from P.E. I need to get through the rest of these shapes so I can set them on their desks. *I maneuvered and weaved my scissors around the remainder of my shapes so I wouldn't be late to pick up my class.* It's always so quiet in here while they're at specials, *I mused as I finished cutting the last of my shapes.*

My lead teacher's voice filled the classroom that was devoid of our students' giggles and whispers. "Oh, hi! How's it going?" I looked up—my side of the desk was aligned directly across from our classroom door. One of the other teachers from our grade level stood in the doorway.

[The guest editors arranged the essays to be read progressively. We suggest that readers first read the introduction and then approach these essays in their order. —Ed.]

Dr. Amanda LeClair-Diaz (Eastern Shoshone & Northern Arapaho) is the Indian Education Coordinator of Fremont County School District #21, which is in Fort Washakie, Wyoming, on the Wind River Reservation. Dr. LeClair-Diaz received her Ph.D. in Language, Reading, and Culture with a major focus in Indigenous Education and a minor focus in Teaching and Teacher Education from the University of Arizona.

"Hi," the team teacher said. I waved, motioned for her to enter, and gathered my and my lead teacher's shapes.

"Your class is at specials?" the team teacher asked.

"Yes, Amanda's about to go pick them up," answered my lead teacher as I organized and placed the shapes on each of our students' desks.

"We just finished our reading comprehension assessment," the team teacher shared with my lead teacher.

"How did it go?" asked my lead teacher. I heard the team teacher let out a deep sigh. She answered, "They didn't even know what a taxi was."

My throat tightened, and my teeth clenched together. This was a familiar feeling—one that I was never prepared to deal with in the moment. I had it through my childhood and adolescence when my peers and teachers would make, indirectly or directly, racist statements to me about being Native and being from the reservation.

I placed the last set of shapes on one of our students' desks. "I'm going to go pick up the kids," I said to my lead teacher and other co-worker. They both nodded at me and continued their conversation.

Why didn't you say something? *I asked myself as I stepped up the stairs to the main hallway.* I wouldn't have known what taxis were at that age either.

My footsteps were cushioned by the main hallway's carpet as I rushed to the gym. As I rounded the corner of the hallway, I saw a little head poke out of the entryway of the gym. It was the line leader of our class, and she grinned at me. I waved and smiled back as I neared my destination. My students were ready to head back to class.

As the students and I made our way down the hall, I asked myself again, Why didn't you say anything in the moment to the team teacher? There are so many things you think of after the moment when these situations happen—why can't you think of what to say sooner? *We had made it to our classroom, and my students made their way to their desks. I saw that the team teacher had left. My lead teacher made her way to the front of the class to begin our afternoon lesson.*

I stood in the back of the classroom and watched the students shuffle through their shapes. The pit in my stomach still weighed heavily, and my jaw remained tightly clamped. This reaction I had, caused by the team teacher's comments, reminded me of feelings of inadequacy I had growing up. I knew what it was like for people to make assumptions about you based on how you looked or where you're from. It made me feel like I was insignificant and didn't belong anywhere—I didn't want that for my students.

The incidents discussed in this vignette occurred while I was a paraprofessional at Chokecherry Hill School[1] in my home community of Gahni, Wyoming, which is located on the Wind River Reservation. Chokecherry Hill School is a public, state-run

school and consists of pre-kindergarten through twelfth grades. The school has a student population that is approximately 90 percent Native.[2] Conversely, Chokecherry Hill School's certified teachers are predominantly non-Native.

My time as a paraprofessional was filled with learning experiences that enlightened me about what it was to be an educator to children. It also taught me about working together as a team with other educators to ensure our students met learning goals. The incidents I shared in my vignette jarred me for various reasons. It was surprising to hear my colleagues' perspectives and how they focused on the students' "lack of learning" instead of the curriculum. For instance, with my team teacher and her comment, the main focus had been on the students not knowing what a taxi was. I had grown up in the same community where the school I worked at was located, and I had attended elementary school in a nearby town. Towns within the county were extremely rural. Taxis were unnecessary due to the ruralness of the area. Was the curriculum being used in our classrooms and the way learning was being assessed best suited for the students at Chokecherry Hill School? These occurrences made me wonder what it would be like for teachers from my community who had a genuine desire to create inclusive classrooms and wanted to challenge restrictive educational policies and systems to have time and space devoted to posing questions and dialoguing. What type of curriculum could teachers create if they challenged their own biases and systemic racism? How could learning goals for students change if students' perspectives were included more in the curriculum? For our Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho communities, what are ways teachers can dedicate time to dream of lessons that center our cultures and languages?

In reflecting on the incidents from my vignette, I realized there were multiple layers to why I hadn't spoken up. At both moments, I had to process and check-in with myself to see if I had heard what my colleagues were saying correctly. Chokecherry Hill School's student population was primarily Native, while most of the teachers were non-Native. At the time, I was baffled to see how teachers who were teaching in a predominantly Native community would have such deficit views on their students' learning.

While the students were focused on their shapes activity, my mind wandered to another incident that happened when I was on playground duty. It had snowed earlier that week, so the children and I were bundled in hats, gloves, and thick jackets. As my class and I walked out on the playground, I heard the snow crunch sharply and quickly underneath their feet as they ran. Soon, we were joined by a colleague and their class. The colleague and I exchanged niceties. We stood side by side, facing opposite directions so we could keep an eye on either side of the playground. My colleague began discussing a lesson they had recently taught. I listened and nodded, keeping watch on the children on my side of the playground while we talked.

"You know, you really have to dumb it down for the kids out here."

I stopped nodding my head. The familiar pit in my stomach and jaw clench happened immediately, and I fully turned my head to look at my colleague. They carried on their conversation, unphased by my expression or silence.

Again, why didn't you say anything? *I asked myself about that memory.*

"You all did great! Let's get ready for recess."

My lead teacher's voice interrupted my cycle of thoughts. I stood by the door and watched as our students put on their winter gear to head out to the playground.

What my colleagues had said also reminded me of what prior teachers and peers had said about me or about other Indigenous students I attended school with. Their comments brought back feelings of inadequacy that I had felt, and I wasn't sure how to call in someone without the conversation escalating. Incidents like these made me feel small and insignificant, even if I tell myself the opposite. Now, I know it is not me who is the problem or the outlier, but the larger system. If I could return to this time, in both instances I would have asked my colleagues if the issue was the students not understanding or the type of curriculum that was being taught. This could have then led into inquiries about how could we expect students to test on objects and concepts that aren't a part of their lived experiences, how can a space be created to center Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho languages and culture in curriculum, and how can a teacher push through problematic rhetoric and obstacles when committing to educating Indigenous youth?

When I had access to certain resources and met other Indigenous people in graduate school, I began to see a possible pathway to answer these inquiries. My time as a paraprofessional led me to imagine what it would be like if all of us at Chokecherry Hill School prioritized our culture and language. As a graduate student, I heard stories from my peers about work they did in their communities of creating curriculum that privileged students' lived experiences. I dreamed what this would be like for my community and began to intentionally take steps to make this a reality. I understood in my studies I had access to resources that had limited availability. What would the impact be on a practitioner's viewpoint if they were provided the same resources I had in graduate school and also a support network of peers they could meet with? For the teachers in my tribal community, what would it be like if they had access to resources, discussed these resources with one another, and make the information they learn relevant to our community?

I decided the best way for me to begin addressing these inquiries was through my dissertation. This study was based on Indigenous teachers, the knowledge they carry with them, and how they pass on their knowledge to learners in their classrooms. I wanted to amplify Indigenous teachers' perspectives of their students and community to counteract racist and deficit views I had heard from predominantly non-Native teachers. What led to me deciding to ground my study in Indigenous educators' perspectives was from conversations with former colleagues. It was evident they had a desire to incorporate more culture and language into their classrooms, but the issues

they faced were a lack of time and resources, and an overwhelming feeling of not knowing where to take initial steps.

For this project, seven teachers participated. I had connections with the majority of the participants prior to my study. They all taught at Chokecherry Hill School. The seven teachers' names were Emma, Charlotte, Clara, Maya, Ava, Naomi, and Vivian and all had lineage to Eastern Shoshone and/or Northern Arapaho tribes. Each of their stories of how they became teachers is unique and based on their connections to the community of Gahni, Wyoming.

> **Emma:** I have known Emma since she was a baby. When she and I talked at the beginning of the study, one of the defining characteristics she shared about herself was being a mother. Emma also talked about her profession as a teacher, how the majority of her students were related to her, and how she was an alumna of Chokecherry Hill School.
>
> **Charlotte:** Charlotte is someone I have known all my life. She has taught in Gahni for decades, which is evident from current and former students who stop to talk to her outside of school. Similar to Emma, Charlotte also attended Chokecherry Hill School.
>
> **Clara:** Clara is someone I have known because of the various connections she has to my family. Her child and I attended school together, so I know Clara as a parent, an educator and a speaker of the Eastern Shoshone language.
>
> **Maya:** Maya and I got to know each other during the study. Through the other teachers, I had heard about Maya's work and impact as an educator. She is an alumna of Chokecherry Hill School.
>
> **Ava:** Ava and I met when she began her teaching career. I have always known her to be a committed and helpful educator who is connected to Chokecherry Hill School through her family.
>
> **Naomi:** Naomi has always been present in my life. She was a former student of Chokecherry Hill School, which influenced her desire to become a teacher.
>
> **Vivian:** I have known Vivian for her whole life and have seen her accomplish the goal she set of becoming a teacher at Chokecherry Hill School. Her connection to Chokecherry Hill School is through her family.

For me, it is important to share the relationships I have with these teachers because it helped us fortify and nurture the concept of community in this inquiry. We all are a part of the Wind River Reservation community, and the majority of us had existing relationships prior to the study. Initially, I was self-conscious about the prior relationships I had with the majority of the teachers. I knew other researchers and scholars would wonder how I could remain unbiased and objective in my work. I learned what was more important was a lesson I was taught from the beginning of my life—that relationships are key to who we are as Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho

people. The relationships I had with the teachers and the trust we had with one another made it easy to move into authentic conversations around thoughts about the curricula they were teaching in their classrooms. I was conducting research, but the teachers and I would fall into our roles and relationships, and I wanted to make sure I remained true to who I was and how they knew me. To them, I wasn't Amanda the doctoral student. I was a former colleague of theirs, a relative, a fellow tribal member.

The teachers discussed how the curricula they taught in their grade levels wasn't connected to the local community of the Wind River Reservation or Wyoming in general. A few of the teachers shared how if students came across concepts or objects they didn't recognize, this could make instruction time and teaching goals challenging because of added time they had to take to provide an explanation. When I heard the teachers speak to this, I was reminded of the team teacher who came to my lead teacher's and my classroom to lament about the children not knowing what a taxi was in their assessment.

Some of the teachers did see the lack of local knowledge in the curriculum as an opportunity to create their own lessons that had teaching goals similar to the standardized curriculum. The teachers who shared how they had navigated the curriculum and provided local perspectives so their students could understand and connect with lessons showed how there was a need and desire for curriculum centered on Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho language and culture.

Teachers felt the desire to center Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho knowledges in their curriculum. They then discussed where to start this work and how to best support one another. After our first focus group, I asked the teachers what their overall feelings were in the moment. Their responses showed how there was a definite need to (1) collaborate with each other, (2) rethink their curricula and starting points of where they could begin the work, and (3) make school a more community-inclusive space. One teacher shared how these were actions they felt were necessary for a long time while another educator stated they saw the necessity for Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho knowledge and languages in curriculum, but they had been trained to focus heavily on meeting standards and felt uncomfortable not prioritizing that.

These points led to a discussion about challenges the teachers had endured when they engaged in tough conversations with their colleagues about the history of education in Indigenous communities. The teachers spoke about an incident that happened during their school year. They participated in a district-wide book reading group in which a majority of their colleagues also participated and all read the same book, Vine Deloria Jr.'s and Daniel R. Wildcat's 2001 *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*.[3] The teachers stated that in the book discussion groups they participated in, some colleagues reacted to the topics discussed in the book—such as the history of boarding schools and the traumatic impact these institutions had on Indigenous people—in a way that was volatile and hurtful. Specifically, Emma stated, "like Naomi pointed out the book we read this past year—it ruffled a lot of feathers, which is kind of discouraging in a school on a reservation. Our population is predominately Native and so I'd hope that there are some readings out there that won't ruffle people's feathers." At various points in the research activities of the dissertation, the teachers

asked questions of how to deal with difficult moments like what they experienced in the book discussion group and how to bring people into conversations that may be challenging or uncomfortable. When these questions and observations occurred, I would remind the teachers that the space we had created was ours. I remembered all the times I was made to feel silent in difficult moments. Specifically, I recalled the moments with my former non-Native team teachers. I wanted the teachers in this study to know they didn't have to stifle their thoughts or feelings to appease non-Native people and dominant society. I also thought about how it was important to think about ways they could collaborate with other people, and it was also vital for the teachers to have time to reflect on their curricula and how to center Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho ways of knowing in their classrooms. There was a constant awareness and questioning of how teachers push through obstacles and hurdles, look for what can and is working in their classrooms, and prioritize students in their work.

In my observations of the focus groups, it was evident the teachers could become their own support network. Near the end of the research activities for the dissertation, the perspective and question came up again about how to bring other colleagues and administration into the conversation around this work. I took the opportunity to tell the teachers that a way to address how to work with colleagues and plan how to deal with challenges was to lean on one another. At the final focus group, one of the teachers stated it would be good to create their own committee so they could continue to support one another and move this work forward. The inquiries the teachers had around collaborating with other people and working through challenges led to the teachers planning for future efforts past the research activities of the dissertation.

When the teachers in my study supported one another, they were able to consider and ask what they wanted to move toward in their work of centering Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho culture and language in curriculum. After the first focus group, I asked each teacher to share their biggest take-away from the readings and guest speaker's presentation. Charlotte stated,

> "I think working together, especially if there's close to ten of us here and doing those types of things and using culture more, I think would benefit our students. I know it's hard and from teaching over thirty years, I think we've had our ups and downs. I've seen those high test scores, I've seen mediocre test scores, and I'm seeing scores that haven't been very good. And I'm ready for change. . . . I think it's time that we really look at what we're doing and really evaluate and maybe change it."

Before Charlotte spoke, the other teachers had shared they understood the importance of centering Indigenous culture and language in classrooms, yet they were apprehensive to fully push back against standards. They admitted that prioritizing and following standards had been ingrained in them. Charlotte shared her own insights with the other teachers and how it was imperative that change be enacted to center culture and language more in their teaching. Another interesting point from this conversation was how Charlotte presented the idea to the other teachers of unifying instead of working individually. This was the first instance when one of the teachers

spoke about leaning on one another for support and working together *toward* a goal of grounding their classrooms in Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho cultures and languages.

Further along in the study, a few of the teachers spoke about different ways they were finding to push through problematic rhetoric.

> **Naomi:** I'm on [a] committee, and I'm the only Indian teacher on this committee. And they're [non-Native colleagues] coming up with like, a vision and mission statement for our school. And one of the choices was every student every day, and then someone wanted to say, teaching and learning the Native way. And so everyone looks at me to see if I think it's okay. And the principal said, "So what do you think of that?" I said, "No," I said, "because we're not doing that." And the whole room was silent. But I said, we're not teaching and learning in the Native way. I said, "This is a Westernized school." And I know a lot of the teachers probably were rolling their eyes that are on, on that committee because they're getting tired of me saying stuff, but I'm just going to say it. It's been happening at meetings. At this meeting the other day I got done talking [and] one of the teachers at my table said, "Well, good luck with that," because I said I was going to start doing more culturally relevant stuff. I don't know if you guys were in the meeting were you? Emma and Charlotte?
>
> **Charlotte:** I remember when you gave the presentation, but I didn't hear the comment the teacher made.
>
> **Emma:** I'm also on the committee for my grade. And I feel the same way. I'm always like, "Hold on, let's think about this through this lens." And I definitely know what you mean when you say you feel like people are rolling their eyes at you. We've tried doing it this way for so long. It's just like trying to fit a square into a circle hole; it's not going to work. It doesn't matter what curriculum you buy. It's just not going to work. So why don't we try something new and tailor it to our kids? What others need the most about it, they're always like, "Well, this works for other poverty-stricken schools." And it's just not a cure all. It drives me nuts but it's like, the answers we have from those schools like, just because we're a poor community too doesn't mean that what works for them is going to work for us. We have so many differences. They just don't account for it. And, Naomi, the meeting where you brought up how the research they're presenting to us didn't reflect any Native schools or community. I thought that was so awesome. I talked to our principal right after that. He said, "Well, yeah, there's just not a lot of research." And I said, "Well, hold on, let me share with you some resources." So I haven't heard back from him. But that's just an ignorant statement to say that there's no research or there's not a lot of research to support this because there is.
>
> **Naomi:** I was thinking that too. They're like [the curriculum Chokecherry Hill School wants to invest in worked for] over ten million people and like, I don't care

> about ten million people. I care about what's happening right here. But I felt like I offended them.

Naomi's, Charlotte's, and Emma's discussion illustrated how the teachers leaned on one another for support and were also leaning *towards* how to challenge practices and curricula they felt weren't suitable for their students and community. This conversation, in comparison with the earlier quote from Charlotte, shows how the teachers became more grounded in relationship to one another and focused on validating one another's actions in speaking out about teaching practices they felt would work best for them and their students. The teachers' dialogues and their sharing about their experiences (specifically, what it was like to be the one Native teacher on their school's committees) eventually led the teachers to state they felt an all-Native teacher committee could be beneficial to continue their development around aligning their teaching with Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho cultures and languages.

Throughout my work with this group of teachers, they shared moments in which they took action to strengthen efforts toward integrating Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho culture into their own pedagogy and into the school's curriculum. At one point in the study, Ava reached out to me about an incident with a colleague:

> I need some advice. I have another new colleague who isn't very culturally sensitive. She did the nature side and assigned a lesson on a book about owls. I know one parent spoke to her; another one didn't like the lesson but did it anyway. I talked to her and she asked another teacher's opinion [about the lesson] and she didn't seem to think it was a big deal so she did it anyway. I didn't know about her lesson since we departmentalize. I already talked to her, and it seemed she thought she shouldn't do it but did it anyway.

I responded to Ava and asked if she felt comfortable reaching out to her colleague again to discuss how concerned community members had touched base with her regarding the lesson and how the Eastern Shoshone Tribe see owls as a bad omen. She stated she felt like she should. When I reached out to Ava to ask how her conversation went, she said that it had gone better than she had anticipated, and she was glad she decided to broach the topic with her again. Ava reaching out to me about this incident illustrated to me how she was positioning herself as an Indigenous educator after participating in our focus groups.

At another point during my dissertation study, Naomi shared how she created lessons that centered Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho origin stories; she had created PowerPoint slides with the story and images featured on each slide. One day she taught the Eastern Shoshone origin story, and the next day she taught the Northern Arapaho origin story to her students. Creating a foundation in her lesson out of these origin stories depicts how Naomi was envisioning Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho knowledge systems in her classroom.

These two moments are strong examples of the ways in which these teachers took the knowledge, connection, and strength from their shared conversations with other Native teachers and turned those conversations into actions that directly impacted

teaching and curriculum in classrooms: Ava intervened with another teacher who was creating curriculum that was incongruous with Eastern Shoshone culture and practices, and Naomi found a way to integrate Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho culture in her own curriculum. For these teachers, the work they did within the shared space they created with their Native colleagues led to changes in classroom curriculum and teaching, strengthening the presence of students' Indigenous culture within the school.

Future Dreams and Steps

At the end of the study, the teachers dreamed of ways they could incorporate the knowledge they learned into their teaching.

Emma: Emma expressed interest in wanting to develop a claims, evidence, and analysis essay lesson that centered students' identities and topics pertinent to Indigenous communities.

Charlotte: Charlotte wanted to create a lesson that was based on identity where a student and their family could collaborate to complete assignments. She also felt it would be important to develop a lesson that focused on community celebrations she recalled from her childhood and a unit on Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho stories.

Clara: Clara established a summer language institute that Chokecherry Hill School students could partake in.

Maya: Maya expressed wanting to design a unit around identity that focused on students learning about their ancestors and bringing in family members to present to her class.

Ava: Ava identified a possible math lesson around beadwork and an additional lesson that focused on students creating regalia for powwows.

Naomi: Naomi discussed creating a lesson that centered Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho traditional stories that focused on sacred sites and taking her students on field trips to these sites.

Vivian: Vivian envisioned herself as a resource for her colleagues at Chokecherry Hill School who expressed interest in Indigenous education.

The most important take-away from this study was how these teachers came together and demonstrated the power that can generate from relationships and dialogues. The teachers were able to find support among one another in a shared space and took time to analyze their own educational experiences and their journeys to becoming teachers. They also learned how to encourage to change, which was critical for them to begin answering inquiries about teaching course work that is bolstered by Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho languages and cultures. They demonstrated

how practitioners can find strength and lean on one another for support to combat racist teachers and an educational system that views Indigenous people and knowledge in deficit views.

Wiikwedong Early Childhood Development Collaborative

For the Wiikwedong Early Childhood Development Collaborative (Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative), located in the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, the team members' support of one another and their understanding about the differences and parallels they have among their programs is a powerful example of what a support network of Indigenous people and allies of Indigenous people can accomplish. In their article, LaRose, Denomie and the Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative states how they come together to discuss how they can unite to make the biggest impact.[4] They evoke the metaphor of rivers and creeks to illustrate how they ebb and flow between their own individual program's work and then unite together in a larger body of water, Gichigami (Lake Superior), to address the needs of their community. Similar to the teachers I know, the Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative team members—Cheryl, Lisa, Heather, Terri, and Kim—sought and continue to seek opportunities to build on the skills and knowledge they possess in order to provide high-quality services based in Ojibwe culture.

In Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative's article, authors Cheryl LaRose and Lisa Denomie recall the initial steps members made to come together and "work for higher-quality early learning and care programs" that are grounded in Ojibwe ways of knowing and language. LaRose and Denomie discuss the beginning of their journey toward becoming a collaborative and liken the beginning dialogue among members to "incessant babbling among creeks, articulating hopes of revitalizing the Ojibwe language and culture."[5] For initiatives, coming together can be the most difficult step. Once the members of Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative built on their beginning dialogues and relied on former relationships, they were able to work together fully as partners in Community-Based Inquiry. What Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative accomplished is inspiring to many tribal programs and initiatives.

I see parallels between the teachers who participated in my dissertation and the Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative in that the teachers' initial dialogues identified a need for a group of like-minded people who shared similar goals to come together. They expressed multiple times during our focus groups that this was the first time they were able to take a moment to sit down and talk with each other. As mentioned earlier, some of the teachers expressed the need for a Native teacher committee at the school to continue the conversations they were having and to create action from these conversations. Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative members have created a model showing other practitioners how to come together and commit to transformative community work.

All five team members of Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative acknowledge that the relationships they have built with one another is what strengthens and grounds their collaborative. These relationships also are what guide their inquiries regarding

how to best serve the children and family in the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community. What is most inspirational about the Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative's process and work is how they are modeling what it looks like for community members to dedicate time and space to examine their systems and see what is working and what can improve through their collaboration. For many tribal communities, questions arise from various entities and program about how to work together and communicate more effectively. Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative demonstrates how a common goal among all programs of cultural and language revitalization is what brought all of the team members together and the necessity of supporting one another in this objective. They show what transformative work can occur when community members are able to communicate with one another on common desires, create their own inquiries from these conversations on similar wants, and prioritize Indigenous language and culture.

Being able to lean on one another can lead practitioners to focus on transformative changes. Community-Based Inquiry makes this achievable because it prioritizes relationships as well as the questions and perspectives community members have instead of outside researchers' and institutions' inquiries. Both the Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative and the teachers I know show how they pushed through obstacles by nurturing the relationships they have and supporting one another in prioritizing their tribes' languages and cultures in their communities. I have learned it is possible to work through past traumas through communication and asking questions about practices and systems that are presented as the "norm." I have also learned that who I am as an Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho woman has always been more than enough and that this work I engage in is so all the Native children, future Native scholars, and future Native educators know that people who have shamed them for being themselves are wrong. The knowledge and history our ancestors passed on to us as well as who we are as Native people are what can break us free and create change for ourselves and our communities. As can be seen in Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative's work and Chokecherry Hill School's teachers' conversations, Native people have the knowledge and ability to enact change themselves in their communities. When we work together, we are beyond powerful.

Notes

1. Pseudonyms are used for the school, town, and names of the teachers to protect the identities of the participants.
2. Amanda LeClair-Diaz, "It Has Just Opened My Eyes to How Important It Is": An Analysis of Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Teachers: Engagement with Critical Indigenous Theories" (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2022).
3. Vine Deloria Jr. and Daniel Wildcat, *Power and Place: Indian Education in America* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2001).
4. Cheryl LaRose, Lisa Denomie, and Wiikwedong ECD Collaborative, "Niwiidosendimin (We Walk with Each Other)," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 47, no. 1 (2024): 11–26.
5. Ibid., 13.