Exploring settler innocence among early childhood educators in the Osage community: A case study

by

Joni Hall

B.S., Oklahoma State University, 2007
M.Ed., Kansas State University, 2018

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2022

Abstract

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and teacher development as it relates to Osage and other Indigenous contexts at the teacher level, policy level, and tribal government level.

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Major Professor
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Acknowledgements

My educational journey has taken me down paths that I never thought possible if it were not for the remarkable leaders who recognized and invested in me. I am truly grateful for the time, knowledge, and guidance that I have received from my professors and advisor at Kansas State University. Thank you for modeling how to view this world in different ways, and for preparing me to be able to approach qualitative research in ways that I can contribute to the field of education and continue to be a voice for our Native children.

I would also like to acknowledge the public school teachers who have and continue to dedicate their time to shape and build educational foundations for our children. You selflessly devote your time and resources to your students by creating learning spaces and experiences that build the social, emotional, and cognitive development for children to be successful in this world. I am thankful for the wonderful teachers in my life who have impacted me in school; you have ultimately cultivated my love of education, and I hope that I have made an impactful difference in my students' lives the same way that you have for me.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the incredible colleagues, administrators, friends, and families throughout my teaching career who have helped me make sense of teaching and how to be a better facilitator of learning. The grace that you have showed me through all my questions, ideas, failures, and successes from the day I walked into my first classroom to the day I started down this path have never wavered. I have so many wonderful experiences teaching with an amazing group of teachers and thank you for always being pillars of strength and encouragement for me.

Dedication

I dedicate my accomplishments to my entire family who have shown constant support, encouragement, and inspiration every step of the way during my educational endeavors. To mom and dad, thank you for teaching me persistence, always being willing to listen to me, teaching me how to make sense of this world, and teaching me patience and gratitude. You have taught me the value of hard work and that failures are not only okay, but that they are opportunities to learn how to be a better version of myself. I hope to be a role model for my children the way that you are for me. Jann, thank you for always being the intelligent, funny, and supportive sister that I need. Thank you for listening to me, supporting my ideas, and going down this educational path with me.

Finally, I dedicate my endeavors to my husband and children. Ross, thank you for being my biggest fan. I hope you know that because of your unceasing support you were instrumental in protecting the space for research that supports Indigenous children, just like ours. To Blythe and Diesel, I hope you both know that all this work has been for you. You have done nothing but encourage me through your curiosity for learning and all the accomplishments that I have seen you achieve in your own educational journeys. I hope you never stop asking questions and seeking knowledge, and I am so proud of how you each explore this life through your own unique lenses. Just remember that your education is something that can never be taken away from you, and to always be confident in yourself as an Osage in this world. You will accomplish so much, and I will always be here to support and inspire you like you did for me.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Background

It was a cold afternoon in early November as I sat at my desk looking out my finger-smudged window at the changing leaves on the trees that lined the playground of our school, located on the edge of the Osage Reservation[1]*. I had just loaded up the last of our bus-riders for the day and was listening for my own children's footsteps to come down the empty hallway into my kindergarten classroom. My thoughts of preparing for the next day's activities were interrupted by my son bursting through the doorway as he exclaimed, "Mama! Look what my teacher put in my folder..."*

With the Thanksgiving holiday fast approaching, I was expecting to see reminders to read daily at home in preparation for end of quarter testing or sign-up lists for classroom snacks. Instead, I read a note from my son's teacher asking parents to help their student write a story about what they thought it was like to be a Native American child during the First Thanksgiving. The teacher explained that the students should be able to do this assignment easily because they had just read a cute story about the First Thanksgiving, and the students knew lots of fun facts. They learned how the Pilgrims worked hard while the Native Americans played games, happily shared a meal, and taught them how to grow food, just to name a few. Missing was the reality

[1] The term reservation is complex and refers to the Osage tribe's 1.47 million acre jurisdictional area (Osage Nation Minerals Council , 2022), and is contiguous with the Osage Mineral Estate and Osage County. Although the ruling from Osage Nation v. Irby (2011) recently disestablished the Osage reservation, the term is still common among the people in the area. I will move between the terms county and reservation, but will prioritize reservation for the purpose of centering Osage sovereignty, as there is still significant acreage of Osage owned trust land within the minerals estate boundaries.

that this was an abbreviated and cherry-picked snapshot of a story that was full of conquest, manipulation, murder, and theft. The problem with this assignment was that it perpetuates a false myth of colonial-Indigenous histories, and it failed to embrace the reality that non-white cultures and peoples who still exist in present day are subjected to this story through curricular design and repetitive status quos. The assignment lacked depth and failed to prepare students for the complicated histories they have all inherited. These lessons perpetuate the concept of tourist curriculum where children briefly visit non-white cultures and focus on exotic differences and think that these cultures exist only in the past (Gutierrez-Gomes & Pauly, 2012).

…Without pause, I looked at my little boy, a sandy-blonde, blue-eyed Osage, who just looked back at me with confusion and said, "But I am Native, why do I have to pretend to be one?"

We need our systems, and our teachers, to be able to respond to the unique and complicated socio-cultural histories we have all inherited: Our settler-colonial entanglements. Our schools in general have struggled to meet the needs of Native children nation-wide (NIES, 2019), which highlights the need to study settler innocence, or the European-centered belief that whites are not responsible for past or present racial colonial structures and that there is no interest in knowing or coming to know about these structures (Lees et al., 2021). This is particularly important considering over 90% of our nation's Native students are attending general public schools, most of which are staffed with non-Native teachers who are generally not prepared to teach Native content (NIEA, 2019). In an era where diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are becoming increasingly important in schools, there is a need to explore how our

early childhood teachers are prepared to provide culturally responsive learning environments for Native children in our schools.

Given that the Osage Nation is one of 574 federally recognized Native nations, which all have unique and distinct languages and cultures, there is also value in exploring how all of this unfolds in Osage specific contexts. Current statistics show that Oklahoma, which is home to 39 Native nations, is ranked among the top five states with the highest percentage of American Indian and Alaska Native students in the United States at 17.4% (NCAI, 2020). Additionally, 15% of the population in Osage County, Oklahoma are Native American or Alaska Native (United States Census Bureau, 2020). Given that Osage county is contiguous with the Osage reservation boundaries, and the county seat in Pawhuska, Oklahoma is also the capitol of the Osage Nation, many of the Natives in this area are Osage. Furthermore, aside from a recently developed birth through fifth grade school administered by the Osage Nation, the great majority of Native students, both Osage and non-Osage, within Osage county are attending schools that are part of the Oklahoma public school system. This provides a unique opportunity to situate a qualitative case study to better understand how Indigenous students and cultures are supported in the classrooms providing early childhood education.

Rationale

Along with the Indigenous population and the geographic location of Osage County in Indian country, there is a unique Osage specific opportunity to understand teachers' perceptions and skills in constructing learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures. When teachers do not provide "mirrors" for children to see themselves and their cultures reflected in the books that are provided in the classroom or are repeatedly exposed to images and representations of their cultural background that are inaccurate, derogatory, or

laughable, they learn that their cultures are devalued in the society with which they are part of (Bishop, 1990, p. 1). Similarly, when children from dominate social groups are not provided "windows" to see that they live in a multicultural world uninsulated from meeting and connecting with others who are unlike themselves, ethnocentrism and an exaggerated sense of importance of the dominate social group are perpetuated (Bishop, 1990, p. 1). Acceptable meaning making practices in education are often controlled by hidden boundaries that shape a deficit-oriented discourse for nondominant students (Bang et al., 2013). Cheryl Harris (1995) offers further insight into what she calls settled expectations, where educational institutions have a set of privileges, assumptions, and benefits that coincide with white status which have come to be expected. There is a need to continue the pursuit of a deeper understanding of how to support culturally relevant pedagogy for all students, or a "sliding glass door" for children to learn from both similarities and differences among their peers and teachers (Bishop, 1990, p. 2).

There exists a critical point in young Indigenous children's lives when they transition from early care settings to school-based programs, and data show that when compared to their peers, Native children do not perform as well academically (Faircloth, 2015). Children's early experiences and access to high quality education in school settings play a large role in academic success, but little research exists that show how schools become ready for children from culturally diverse backgrounds (Faircloth, 2015). The existence of ongoing settler colonialism further perpetuates the tendency to depict Native Americans in the past in literature through curricula that frame Indigenous peoples and cultures as warlike and exotic people of the past (Chaudhri & Schau, 2015; Shear et al., 2015).

Young children should enter developmentally appropriate learning environments at school that are safe and nurturing spaces for learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), and these

spaces should be designed to provoke meaningful learning experiences and inquiry and designed not separate from cultures (Gutierrez-Gomez & Pauly, 2012). It is critical for children to be able to connect to their own cultures at school to support academic success, however, there is minimal literature showing the positive effects of early childhood education on American Indian and Alaska Native students' academic achievement and school readiness skills (Faircloth, 2015). Interestingly, the Osage Nation has identified support for preschool and head start education for their Osage children as an educational priority within their 25-year strategic plan (Osage Nation, 2007; 2018; 2020), which gives this study the unique opportunity to better understand early childhood teachers' perspectives about how Osage children and cultures are supported in Osage County public schools, even if the Osage Nation does not have jurisdiction over those schools.

As we work to improve systems of education to be more responsive for Native children, it is important to understand the context of education within Oklahoma. There are currently 42,551 classroom teachers teaching in public schools across Oklahoma (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2022), with 8.6%, or nearly 4,000 teachers being American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), non-Hispanic (NCES, 2012), one of the highest percentages in the nation. Additionally, according to the 2019 National Indian Education Study (NIES, 2019), 12% of Oklahoma fourth grade teachers participating in the NIES the survey indicated they were AI/AN. Further, 99% of the school districts in Oklahoma provide public pre-kindergarten and 11.58% of Oklahoma students are American Indian (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2021). While this is somewhat proportional statistically, we should keep in mind that all teachers, including American Indians, rely mostly on non-Native state run institutions for their K-12 and higher education learning, which are predominantly Eurocentric. Overall, there is a need to think critically about the ongoing processes of assimilation when all educators, including

Natives, are being trained in state-run institutions (RedCorn, 2016). This reveals a need to explore the preparedness of both Native and non-Native teachers working in Native communities as they construct early learning environments, not only within higher education, but also in their ongoing professional development.

These facts matter as we seek to provide learning environments for children at the early childhood level that are culturally responsive to Indigenous cultures, and to better understand the curricular decision-making process of early childhood teachers when constructing learning environments related to Indigenous peoples and cultures. In a recent study, Lees et al. (2021) discovered that while non-white teachers, specifically Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color, are conscious of settler-colonial constructs that impacted their teaching practice, their understanding was not enough to overcome the mandates and expectations of the public schools. One particular finding from this study was that because of the impact of mandated textbooks and standardization, teachers struggled to meet the needs of children in their classrooms while simultaneously meeting school expectations.

It is important to reconceptualize and rethink what it means for Native children to be school-ready and what that might look like for schools, including early childhood teacher skill sets (Faircloth, 2015). As Smith (2012) asserts, it is important that educators and other professionals affirm connectedness with Indigenous communties to ensure that the activities connect with those communities in humanizing ways. Smith also asserts the role of self-determination in scholarly projects within Indigenous communities, and the need to center Indigenous research around the notion of self-determination. This is reinforced from RedCorn (2021; 2016) as he emphasizes the need for educators to center the role of soveriegnty, both politically and culturally, when working to build capacities for Native nations to be more

involved in the education of their citizens. Specifically, RedCorn (2021; 2016) talks about the need for Native nations to be more involved in the professional development mechanisms that train our educators, which inherently highlights the need to also explore the lack of involvment in the professional development of educators serving Native children.

Like other Native nations, the Osage Nation is a specific community with a unique language, culture, and political body, and the state-run public schools in Osage County are serving approximately 2000 AI/AN students, many of whom are Osage. It is appropriate to draw attention to the Preamble of the Osage Nation Constitution, as it acknowledges the resolution to live in harmony as Osage people call upon the sacred fundamental values of, "Justice, Fairness, Compassion, Respect for and Protection of Child, Elder, All Fellow Beings, and Self" (Osage Nation, 2006, p. 4). Respect and protection of Osage children is sacred to the Osage, and the early learning experiences and education of our children should support this sacred value. As an inherent right of the Osage to be involved in the education of their citizens, the Osage Nation has recently developed their own birth through fifth grade language immersion school as a response to their 25-year strategic plan (Osage Nation, 2018; 2020). While this is a step toward educational sovereignty, the fact remains that Osage County is the largest county in Oklahoma and most Osage and other Native students are still attending public schools.

It is also important to acknowledge that Oklahoma passed House Bill 1775 around the time this study began, which prohibited certain concepts regarding critical race theory to be taught or included in curriculum or materials, included in professional development content, or be part of the schools' plans for diversity, equity and inclusion (OSSBA, 2022). Knowing this, there is value in understanding how critical conversations about race and ethnicity, and in this case political status, influences decision-making processes for teachers. Furthermore, if one were

to approach the literature on educator preparedness in an Osage-centric manner, there is minimal literature, if any at all, focused on how early childhood educators in the Osage community create culturally responsive learning environments for Native children. More specifically, there is minimal literature on how learning environments for Native children are being created in public school settings in the Osage community, and any research on this topic would be of value to both the public schools and the Osage Nation, as they both work to improve the wellbeing of the community as a whole.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this case study is to better understand the curricular decision-making processes of early childhood teachers (ECE; pre-K through third grade) when constructing learning environments related to Indigenous peoples and cultures in 13 public schools serving Native students in Osage County[2]. Specifically, this study will explore ECE teacher unit and lesson planning, as well as perceptions related to confidence and preparedness when creating learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. How do participants describe their curricular decision-making process as it relates to incorporating Indigenous content into their learning environments?
2. How do participants describe their professional preparation to include Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments?

[2] Schools selected are affiliated with the Johnson O'Malley program, which is a federal program that provides funds to schools serving Native children, which will be articulated in the methods portions of this manuscript.

3. How do participants describe their confidence while incorporating Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments?

Positioning Qualitative Research

Qualitative research aligns with my research purpose and questions by allowing me to focus on Indigenous culture in early childhood in public schools through a variety of data collection strategies that help deepen my understanding of unique sociocultural experiences. Qualitative research is interested in how people construct meaning and make sense of their world and the experiences they have lived, felt, or undergone (Merriam, 1998). While quantitative research works to test a theory by designing an experiment to measure variables, qualitative research and inquiry uses the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis through fieldwork and research strategies and produces richly descriptive representations (Merriam, 1998). As Denzin and Lincoln (2017) state, "qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (p. 10). As Kim (2016) elaborates, qualitative research that is informed by various interpretative paradigms uses words in the analysis and focuses on understanding human action through interpretation. It focuses on exploring the complexity of human-ness, which cannot be solely understood by testable observation of quantitative research. Researchers and scholars have recognized that both qualitative and scientific research should exist alongside each other and be valued without giving privilege to one over the other (Kim, 2016).

Rural Context and Operational Constructs

Since conceptualizations of rurality that are underdefined or misinformed can create misconceptions that are potentially harmful to rural communities (Longhurst, 2022), a

description of the rural and small town setting for this study will prevent stereotypes, misconceptions, or assumptions about the communities, school districts, or people who live in these spaces. The rural and small town setting in relation to the schools and participants within this study was important to acknowledge and consider during the design of this study, data collection, data analysis, and how the findings are represented to be useful within these rural communities. It is important to recognize the rural and small town setting of these communities, as well as in context to the Osage Nation. These rural communities are significantly impacted by the Osage Nation, whose headquarters is in the county seat of Pawhuska.

Since Osage County spans across 1,472,000 acres of open prairie and farmland, the physical location of each school district within the county limits access to resources, impacts recruitment and retention of teachers and staff, and affects realistic travel time for people living outside of Osage County. Case in point, the distance between Skiatook school district and McCord school district is over 90 miles, a drive time of nearly four hours round trip on state highways and county-maintained roads that are shared with farmers driving industrial farm equipment and ranchers hauling livestock and other slow-moving agricultural equipment. This study recognizes the impact of rurality and acknowledges the necessity to clarify the context for this study to avoid compromising the quality of this study (Longhurst, 2022). Rural for this case refers to the schools identified by population guidelines of the Oklahoma State Department of Education, the geographic location of the schools within the county, and the local perceptions and knowledges held by community members who consider these schools and communities to be rural. For Oklahoma public schools, rural is defined as (Title V, Part B Handbook: Rural Education Initiative, 2019),

> A rural local education agency is one which is located within an incorporated or unincorporated place which has a district resident population of less than 2,500, or has a population center less than 1,000 persons, and is characterized by sparse, widespread populations (p. 4).

Although Pawhuska, Hominy, and Skiatook school districts are slightly above the district resident population, with Pawhuska's population at 2,948, Hominy's population at 3,261, and Skiatook's population at 8,560 (Oklahoma Demographics, 2022), many of the school districts in Osage County have a district resident population of less than 2,500.

Additional key terms used within the context of this study are defined:

1. ***Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*** – coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings in 1994, culturally relevant pedagogy refers to the academic success, sociopolitical consciousness, and cultural competence that focuses on how educators learn from and not about students as agents in the classroom, such as cultural competence versus cultural assimilation, academic achievement and student learning versus classroom and behavior management, and sociopolitical consciousness versus school-based tasks (Ladson-Billings, 2014).
2. ***Curriculum*** – the operational plan or map that includes a complete description of the academic skills and how the skills will be converted into lesson plans and aligned across classes and grade levels. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) assert that curriculum works as a map of appropriate lessons, activities, and assessments that help make it more likely for students to achieve performance goals and results.
3. ***Early Childhood Education*** – the developmental years of children ages birth through age eight (NAEYC, 2020). In Oklahoma, early childhood teacher certification encompasses

pre-kindergarten through third grade, and developmentally appropriate early childhood classrooms are offered to children beginning at age four entering pre-kindergarten.

4. ***Indigenous Cultures*** – the cultures relevant to the people native to the geographic area of pre-colonial settlement of the land that is now the United States. American Indians and Alaska Natives are the original Indigenous peoples of North American (NCAI, 2020).
5. ***Johnson O'Malley (JOM)*** – a federally funded program that was authorized by the Johnson O'Malley Act of 1934, which provides achievement opportunities for American Indian students, and promotes student and parent involvement through academic and cultural education (Bureau of Indian Education, 2022).
6. ***Learning Environment*** – the physical classroom space that is created and designed to support cognitive, social, and emotional learning on a daily basis. The learning environment reflects the values of the teacher and students, which plays a pivotal role in the process of meaningful learning (NAEYC, 2020).
7. ***Lesson Plan*** – the daily guide of lessons and activities that teachers develop to show what lessons will be taught, how they will be taught, and how the learning will be measured. Lesson plans are developed by the teacher and are adapted to fit the needs and instructional level of the students. The teacher not only states what the students will do, but states what the students will learn during the lessons (Danielson, 2016).
8. ***Osage County*** – Oklahoma is divided into 77 counties, and Osage County is the largest county in the state, covering 2,304 square miles.
9. ***Osage Nation*** – a federally recognized Native American government, which is headquartered in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, and has over 20,000 enrolled members across Oklahoma and throughout the country (Osage Nation Membership/CDIB, 2020).

10. ***Osage Reservation*** – the Osage Reservation is complex and refers to the Osage tribe's 1.47-million-acre jurisdictional area (Osage Nation, 2022), and is contiguous with the Osage Mineral Estate and Osage County. According to the case of *Osage Nation v. Irby* and its ruling, the Osage Reservation has been disestablished and the ruling is currently being challenged (*Osage Nation v. Irby*, 597 F.3d 1117 (10th Cir. 2010).
11. ***Professional Preparation*** – for this study, professional preparation refers to higher education that prepares teacher candidates for certification and licensure to teach in Oklahoma, as well as the professional development and training provided to teachers by the school district.
12. ***Settler Colonialism*** – the justification of American rights and authority to Indigenous resources and lands, which perpetuates erasure of Indigenous peoples from American society (Shear et al., 2018).
13. ***Sovereignty*** – the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples to utilize their homelands and to self-govern, sustain, and renew their cultures and nations, as well as their right to maintain political and social relationships with other nations (Shear et al., 2018).
14. ***Teacher Confidence*** – teacher confidence is informed by Bandura's theory of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012), and for this study it is based on the direct and observable feedback from the teachers and their own judgements on curricular decision-making and overall day to day confidence.
15. ***Teacher Preparedness*** – the educational and professional training and development that teachers receive, which could include the education received at the university level, professional development provided by the school district, or other trainings or collaborations that add to teachers' skillsets.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study will be guided by the theoretical frameworks of *Liberating Sovereign Potential* (RedCorn, 2020), settler innocence (Lees et al., 2021), and perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012). Additionally, community based qualitative research (CBQR) will be braided throughout this study to support engagement of educational systems and community partners (Johnson, 2017). Within CBQR, I will use the elements of collaboration and involvement among community partners and research, while approaching research with a critical stance on issues and topics and using findings to enact change and improve policies and programs (Johnson, 2017). Specifically, CBQR will be employed as part of the research process alongside the theoretical frameworks of *Liberating Sovereign Potential* (RedCorn, 2020), settler innocence (Lees et al., 2019), and perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012). These frameworks informed the construction of the research design, including data collection and analysis, as well as the final representation of findings.

Liberating Sovereign Potential as a Framework

Liberating Sovereign Potential is a working conceptual model designed to help leaders envision the ways their leadership for Indigenous citizens can build capacities for Native nations as they navigate the educational systems and governmental realities (RedCorn, 2020). Central to this model is the assumption that the specific revitalization efforts made by each Indigenous community must be understood in relation to the goals, resources, and locally defined needs, and motivate the work that pushes against the assimilationist status quo. Specifically, the Osage Nation has identified and outlined their own locally defined needs within their 25-year strategic plan (Osage Nation, 2007; 2018; 2020), which has informed this study. RedCorn notes that in order to liberate educational sovereignty, intellectual sovereignty must first be unlocked so that

Native cultures can extend through the system as a whole, as well as influence outside systems, such as teaching styles, pedagogy, curriculum, and leadership styles found in state-run public schools (RedCorn 2020). RedCorn's work is imperative in understanding the underpinnings that are actively and uniquely present across multiple education systems serving Native students. RedCorn (2020) further asserts that in order to engage in (re)centering, there are specific items that need to be considered:

1. Assess the Educational Landscape and Identify Community Assets
2. Foster Professional Growth Across Systems
3. Systems Development and Alignment
4. Foster a Healthy Community of Practice Across All Systems

This study was designed to focus on the capacity building process, specifically addressing RedCorn's (2020) first tenet: Assess the Educational Landscape and Identify Community Assets as it relates to early childhood teachers. Specifically for the Osage community and for this study, this involved assessing the early childhood learning environments in local public schools.

Settler Innocence as a Framework

Settler colonialism is described as a form of colonization where outsiders come to a land that is already inhabited by Indigenous peoples with the purpose of pursuing the new land and resources and claiming the land for themselves as their own new home (Tuck, et al., 2014). Although settler colonialism is generally viewed from a historical lens, settler colonialism in modern day is evidenced by the refusal to recognize oneself as such, denial of history and the Indigenous peoples' resistance to settlement and claims of stolen land, and denial that settler colonialism is ongoing today and not contained in the past. Lees et al. (2021) describe a process known as settler innocence, in which the modern-day white population perceives themselves as

not responsible for the historical and present colonial structures, thereby overlooking the violence that it maintains, and further, having no interest in knowing or coming to know. They call attention to land education as an opportunity to disrupt the settler colonial education and confront ongoing colonialism in US school systems (Lees et al., 2021). Land education acknowledges Indigenous peoples' deep relations with land and water and works to support young children's strong foundation for a more just world when situated in early childhood settings (Lees et al., 2021). These concepts are relevant to accurately understand how Eurocentrism is present, either knowingly or unknowingly, in the educational systems serving all children, as well as our Native children.

Although all of the educational institutions in the United States take place on the traditional homelands of Indigenous peoples, homelands that have been here since time immemorial (NCSS, 2018), recent studies still show that current standardized curriculum does not include Indigenous cultures, histories, and current issues (NCSS, 2018; Shear et al., 2015). Therefore, it is critical to expose these attitudes regarding Indigenous culture to prepare students for life in a diverse world (NCSS, 2018) and to support educators who often feel pressure to assimilate to whitestream norms (Lees et al., 2021). The design of this study was situated to better understand in what ways early childhood learning environments are developed about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures, which can also make the role of settler innocence more visible in those learning environments.

Teacher Perceived Self-Efficacy as a Framework

Teacher perceived self-efficacy is grounded in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2012), which asserts that behaviors are learned vicariously involving imitation and modeling as interrelated strategies. Specifically, learning occurs in a social context through reciprocal

interaction between the person, their behavior, and their environment (Bandura, 2012). This theory emphasizes that behavior is learned through observational learning within the environment and provides the knowledge for predicting behavior, as well as a theory of change and learning (Bandura, 2012). Bandura's concept of teacher self-efficacy was used to inform this study to better understand teacher perceptions of confidence and preparedness. Specifically, perceived self-efficacy will be used to understand how participants describe their confidence while incorporating Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments, and how participants describe their professional preparation to include Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments.

Community Based Qualitative Research

Community based qualitative research will be used as an underpinning to guide this study. Community based qualitative research (CBQR) seeks to develop rapport with community members and works to involve community members to provide input for solutions to community issues (Johnson, 2017). Since this study works to involve the early childhood teachers participating in this study to reflect on their experiences and perspectives to identify solutions and recommendations for ways to support Native children and families, this model will serve as a guide alongside the theoretical frameworks for this study.

Methodological Framework

Case studies are contextual studies that involve the close examination of people, issues, topics, and places and are unique within a specific area of content (Bhattacharya, 2017; Hays, 2004), that allow the researcher to document and interpret a set of outcomes and try to explain how the outcomes came about (Yin, 2013). As a method, a case study can be used in multiple situations in order to contribute to the knowledge of a phenomena (Yin, 2009). Specifically, Yin

(2009) states, “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Case studies allow the researcher to look for patterns that emerge from the data and use the data to answer focused questions over a specified period of time to produce in-depth descriptions and interpretations that can be used for decision-making, discovery, and understanding (Hays, 2004). Clearly stated, case studies allow researchers to gain a deeper understanding in real contexts, as opposed to providing decontextualized evidence (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014).

Revelatory Case as a Single Case Study

Specifically, a revelatory case as a single case study (Yin, 2009) was the best fit for the purpose of this research. The rationale for choosing a revelatory case as a single case study was “that the investigator has access to a situation previously inaccessible to scientific observation” (Yin, 2009, p. 49). Although Eurocentrism is common in school systems across the country, few social scientists have taken the opportunity to investigate the Osage-specific nuances in decision-making within curriculum and learning environments in an area where there is a significant population of Native American students and teachers. Further, the Osage Nation only recently engaged in a constitutional reform effort in 2004-2006 which changed the governance structure from a council system imposed on the Osage people in 1906 to more self-determined three branch system adopted in 2006 (Osage Nation, 2006; Dennison, 2012). This means educational priorities by and for Osage peoples have been updated and further refined since this reformation, which coincided with a dramatic growth in educational programming. Specifically, after the adoption of the new Constitution of the Osage Nation, in 2007 new leadership established its 25-year strategic plan that outlines priorities for the Nation’s growth for education and partnership

building for the Osage people (Osage Nation, 2007; 2018; 2020). This reformation is significant for Osage children because it is the inherent right of the Osages, and all Native nations, to be involved in the education of their citizens. Further, the recent establishment of the new educational priorities that were previously nonexistent created a specific educational phenomenon to be investigated through a revelatory single case study. Specifically, a revelatory case as a single case study was the best fit to investigate the phenomenon of how Indigenous peoples and cultures are supported in Osage county public schools and is "worth conducting because the descriptive information alone will be revelatory" (Yin, 2009, p. 49).

For this revelatory case as a single case study, the case is defined as public schools operating in Osage county, Oklahoma, and the units of analysis are the perceptions of the early childhood teachers working within Osage county. Specifically, this study explores the perceptions of early childhood teachers working at 13 selected public schools in Osage County. Since this study seeks to better understand teacher perceptions and settler innocence among early childhood teachers in Osage communities, the bounds of the case is Osage County. The site selection includes the public schools that are an Osage County public school or have a designation as an Osage Reservation/Osage County Johnson O'Malley (JOM) site school. This includes 12 Osage Reservation/Osage County Johnson O'Malley (JOM) site schools, and one non-JOM pre-kindergarten through eighth grade school in Osage County whose students filter into the surrounding JOM schools for ninth, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades. Johnson O'Malley site schools are public schools within Osage County that receive federal funding to support academic success for the American Indian students (Osage Nation JOM, 2021). The identified JOM site schools are Anderson, Barnsdall, Bowring, Hominy, McCord, Osage Hills, Pawhuska, Prue,

Shidler, Skiatook[3], Woodland, and Wynona (Osage Nation JOM, 2021). Avant is not considered an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school but is an Osage County school district with Native students, of whom will be transferred to surrounding Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site schools for ninth through 12th grades and was included within the site selection for this qualitative study. Similarly, Skiatook is an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school but not an Osage County school district, but because of the Native student population, geographic location within Osage County, and the school's designation as a JOM school, Skiatook was included in this study.

Osage Advisory Committee

In an effort to center Osage sovereignty, an Osage advisory committee was formed with the purpose of gathering feedback and recommendations from Osage leaders in education and cultural settings about the project as it evolved. This advisory committee was unique in that it was comprised of five Osage Nation leaders who provided valuable feedback. The non-contractual advisory committee was established that allowed me to get their perspectives on questions being asked to participants throughout data collection, as well offer an additional layer of interpretation of findings, and recommendations for future practice and research. I included this methodological layer because I do not work for the Osage Nation as an official representative, but I am a member of the community and an Osage citizen, and I wanted to be careful when centering Osage sovereignty so that I do so in mindful ways. Therefore, I incorporated these perspectives to add needed layers into the research design.

[3] The city of Skiatook straddles Osage and Tulsa Counties, with a Tulsa County school designation (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019) as well as a JOM Osage Reservation/Osage County site school designation (Osage Nation JOM, 2021).

Data Collection Methods within Revelatory Case as a Single Case Study

Within a revelatory case as a single case study structure, data were collected through multiple sources, keeping in mind the practicalities of each data collection method in relation to the rural expanse of Osage County. Each added a specific dimension to the study and were intentionally chosen to realistically accommodate early childhood teachers with varying levels of available time, internet and connectivity, and resources. For this reason, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document collection were used to gather rich data. Questionnaires are effective within a case study by allowing the researcher to gain a broader understanding of a particular group, which allowed me to further contextualize the interviews with participants (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014) and gather responses from teachers from across the county. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allowed me to understand the social and cultural structures of the learning environments, as well as develop a rich understanding of the participants' experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017). Questions were also designed to gain a deeper understanding of early childhood teacher perspectives within the selected public schools in Osage County (Morgan & Bottorff, 2010; Morgan, 1996). Lastly, document collection occurred throughout the process and was used to triangulate the data sources to better understand the research questions (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Data Analysis

Coding was used as a method to analyze the data from this study, and Saldaña's (2016) coding procedures were followed. Codes represent the primary content of the data and are what links the data to an explanation of meaning (Saldaña, 2016). For this study, multiple rounds of coding was used to allow the themes to emerge from the data. Saldaña (2016) reminds researchers to approach this process with an analytic lens. The theoretical frameworks informing

this study were used as these specific lenses, which allowed the patterns, categories, and themes to be conceptualized from the codes. As pointed out by Saldaña (2016), when it comes to analyzing qualitative data, coding is just one of the many ways to analyze qualitative data, and not the only way to analyze qualitative data.

Along with Saldaña's coding methods (Saldaña, 2009; 2016), discourse analysis was used to better understand how early childhood teachers in Osage County make sense of Indigenous education and cultures, as well as to better understand how teachers are prepared to teach and support Indigenous cultures in public school early childhood classrooms. Discourse analysis as a method of analysis was used to help understand the spoken and unspoken language of the data collected (Gee, 2014). Since discourse analysis is concentrated on issues, ideas, and themes that are expressed in talk and writing (Gee, 2014), using discourse analysis as a method was appropriate to make sense of the research purpose and questions. Further, since this study sought to better understand settler innocence in early childhood education in Osage County, it was appropriate to acknowledge the discourse surrounding teachers, and the distinctive ways they act and interact with others, including beliefs, values, dress, and how they develop their classrooms into distinctive environments (Gee, 2014). This research sought to better understand how Indigenous cultures are represented in early childhood learning environments, and discourse analysis was used to help make meaning of the ways of *what* the teachers are doing in terms of supporting Indigenous culture and how it is carried out in the classroom (Gee, 2014). Additionally, discourse analysis allowed me to engage in a specific "dance" with words, people, technologies, places, times, values, feelings, objects, and tools to understand the discourses within the early childhood classrooms in Osage County and how the teachers create learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures (Gee, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

For this qualitative case study, it is appropriate to acknowledge the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations related to this research. I acknowledge that my background in human development and early childhood education, my history as a student and teacher within Skiatook public schools, and my Osage citizenship all work to provide unique perspectives throughout the study. I acknowledge my personal and professional subjectivities for this study.

As a lifelong resident in Osage County and a citizen of the Osage Nation, it is reasonable to assume that some participants may be connected to the me through family, my Osage district and clan, professional or educational experiences, or other community relationships. This nuance allowed for rich data collection since trust had already been established. I also recognize that this could have posed as a limitation if participants felt uncomfortable sharing information with someone they already knew. I took these limitations into consideration and did not deliberately seek out participants due to ease or availability and I followed the participant selection based off the research methodology as outlined in Chapter 3.

I also approached this qualitative case study with the assumption that participants for this study could likely include traditional teachers as well as non-traditional teachers, or teachers who have a teaching license but have not completed a teacher certification program. For the 2020-2021 academic school year, the number of emergency certified teachers, or teachers who were not fully certified for their teaching assignment, reached 2,763 in the state of Oklahoma, with 38 emergency teaching certificates specific to school districts across the site schools within this study (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2021). The rise in emergency certified teachers across the state of Oklahoma could have an impact on data specific to teachers' perceptions of confidence, effectiveness, and preparedness to support Indigenous cultures in the classroom. It is

reasonable to assume that emergency certified teachers do not have prior teaching experience or training, and any higher education may not be specific to the field of early childhood education pedagogy. Additionally, this study was approached with the assumption that Native American teachers would be representative of the data as participants of the study.

Anticipated limitations that were identified included technology barriers, such as poor internet connectivity to collect data through semi-structured interviews with early childhood teachers across Osage County, and limitations posed by the current COVID pandemic. I used the guidance of Lobe, Morgan, and Hoffman (2020) to collect qualitative data during times of social distancing. Their recent study on qualitative data collection during the pandemic was helpful to recognize and navigate the nuances of collecting data through virtual platforms, including security, the type of platform that was the best fit for my purpose, and ethical issues (Lobe et al., 2020). However, I found that virtual interviews proved to be a benefit to be able to conduct more timely interviews within more flexible timeframes for both the participants and the researcher, especially given the geographical location and large expanse of Osage County. The ability to conduct semi-structured interviews through a virtual platform also proved to offer participants a more comfortable and convenient option to meet. Further, because of the timing of the study, the public school teachers were transitioning to and from summer break and the ability to meet virtually allowed for more flexibility to meet with participants who may have been traveling or unable to meet in person. Additionally, I recognize that within the Native American cultures, individuals can be reluctant to share information about their cultures with outsiders, especially if recorded, to protect their traditions and stories from being romanticized or used for others' gain. As an Osage citizen myself, I approached this situation with respect and awareness for all participants in this study.

A delimitation within this research study included site selection. This case study was situated in Osage County, Oklahoma, and the sites selected were 13 public schools within Osage County. It is important to note that 12 of the 13 schools are school districts were in partnership with the Osage Reservation/Osage County Johnson O'Malley (JOM) program, and one school was a K-8 school whose students filtered into the 12 surrounding districts. This study excluded school districts that were not an Osage County school district or did not have an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM designation. This meant that Skiatook schools, although technically a Tulsa County school district, was included in the data collection because it was an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school. Similarly, Avant schools were included in the data collection since it was an Osage County school district even though it was not designated as an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school. As a result, all findings were representative of this specific context, which means that while other communities who share similar contexts may find value in the findings, each Native American community is different in various sociocultural, political, and bureaucratic contexts.

Significance of the Study

It is important to acknowledge the significance of this study and how the data collected could be used for future educational decision-making in curriculum and policy. The findings from this study would ideally improve educational environments of Indigenous children, as well as provide teachers and students of all ethnicities a more accurate perception of Indigenous peoples and cultures in a modern context. By contributing to educational research and creating the space for conversations about how Indigenous cultures can be recognized and supported, this study has the potential to develop and strengthen partnerships between the public school systems and the Osage Nation. Community based qualitative research could be used to position this study

to explore rural-Indigenous communities, identify relevant resources, and foster community input and collaboration (Johnson, 2017). Potential trainings, professional development, policy and decision-making, and funding and grant opportunities to support collaborations about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures could also arise because of this study.

Further, this study is significant in that it directly addresses the educational strategies and priorities outlined in the Osage Nation 25-year strategic plan to improve the education and resources for Osage children (Osage Nation, 2007; 2018; 2020). The findings from this study can be used to inform policy and decision-making at the Osage level specific to education for Indigenous children, which is significant given that education is the second highest on the list of areas of focus, with 14 education priorities (Osage Nation, 2007; 2018; 2020). By using the *Liberating Sovereign Potential* framework (RedCorn, 2020), this study will be able to suggest future program building and education improvement, which can improve a move towards Osage self-determination in the form of influence on future professional development for teachers and improved curricular systems for Osage children.

Ultimately, the significance of this study could be realized in both short term and long-term perspectives. The table below organizes how the findings from this study can improve education in rural, Native communities in both short term and long term contexts.

Table 1

Significance of Study, Short Term and Long Term with Connections to CBQR

Significance of Study Short Term	**Significance of Study Long Term**	**Connections to CBQR**
Improve self-awareness of teachers serving Osage students	Influence Oklahoma teacher preparation programs	Engage with rural-Indigenous community members for input and collaboration on key issues

Improve self-awareness of teachers as professionals	Improve Osage self-determination	Identify rural-Indigenous community perspectives and experiences
Improve student self-awareness of Indigenous peoples and cultures	Improve curricular and teacher development decision-making	Engage rural-Indigenous community members to participate in solution to problems
Improve teacher awareness of curriculum and design of learning environments	Extend resources across educational systems	Improve local communities through policy and program decision-making
Develop potential for partnership building across educational systems	Extend future research opportunities	Develop rapport and relationships with rural-Indigenous community members

Note. Although these are potential short term and long-term effects of this study and connections to community based qualitative research, it is important to consider how this study can improve current situations and future generations of students and teachers by seeking to better understand teacher perceptions of confidence, effectiveness, and preparedness when creating learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures.

Subjectivity

It is important to acknowledge my positionality and subjectivity within this study in order to be fully transparent about the research and inquiry process. As Peshkin suggests, subjectivity is insistently present in all research and non-research aspects of our lives; subjectivity is "like a garment that cannot be removed" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). Not only will my research benefit by acknowledging and being attentive to my subjectivity throughout the research process, but the understanding of my own subjectivity also allowed my unique personal qualities to join with the data (Peshkin, 1988). Peshkin describes the subjective I's within the aspect of one's whole self, but states that the I's may change as the conditions of the research change. His concept of

subjective I and situational subjectivity illustrates how the researcher brings all of oneself to the research, but particular conditions may elicit only a subset of one's I's (Peshkin, 1988).

Given this understanding of subjectivity, I identified my own subjective I's as they constitute my whole self. I view my subjectivity as an overlapping, ongoing, nonlinear construct that is constantly evolving from my own lived experiences. My personal lived experiences have shaped my subjective self, and ultimately, these are constantly evolving and churning to funnel into my subjective I's. My role as wife, mother, student, observer, educator, researcher, family member, and Native American are constantly fluctuating and recalibrating as I continue through my life journey. Each subjective I works together to create my subjectivity, and I chose to demonstrate my subjectivity in such a way that shows how each subjectivity is not independent in and of itself. When I enter a space, I do not pick and choose my subjectivity, rather, I acknowledge that I am able to establish where I stand, what I believe, and how it relates to what I want to understand and know in my research (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Below I have broken down my subjectivities into two major categories: personal and professional.

Personal Subjectivity

My subjectivity as an Osage female, wife, and mother living in a rural and small town community in Osage County was largely shaped by my experiences growing up in an Osage household as a light-skinned, blonde-haired, blue-eyed Osage. I grew up in a small community on the outskirts of Tulsa, Oklahoma. My upbringing as an Osage girl was protected by my mother, father, grandparents, and family who taught my sister and I the values of our culture and the importance of education. The value of asking questions and continuously seeking knowledge was instilled in me by the virtues modeled by mother parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Because education was presented to my sister and I from a very young age as something

that can never be taken away from us and should be cherished and nurtured, my sister and I graduated Valedictorians from high school, earned multiple degrees from universities, and ultimately became successful, independent, self-reliant Osage women. As I reflect on my past and look toward the future, I am reminded that I am a product of my ancestors who had the strength and knowledge to overcome the forces that worked to remove them and erase Indigenous peoples and cultures. Because of my existence, I have purpose to honor my ancestors by contributing my efforts and knowledge to education in a way that impacts our youngest Native children to continue this story for generations to come.

Today, my own children are light skinned and blue-eyed, and like my own experiences growing up, they assimilate into the school system with the majority of the white students in the district. I was never taught Osage culture and worldviews by my teachers or curriculum in school, and I was often dressed up by my teachers to be a pilgrim in the Thanksgiving play each year in grade school because of my blonde hair. As a student I was extremely studious and never questioned my teachers' decisions for my academic journey. One of the most pivotal points in my educational journey transpired when I was 9 years old. My mother dropped me off at school and told me to do my best on the mandated state test, which was scheduled to begin first thing that morning. As a high-achieving student, I was mentally prepared and felt the flutter in my stomach as I sat anxiously at my desk to begin the test. That twinge of excitement quickly turned to defeat when my teacher stood next to me and instructed me to erase "Native American" on my test booklet and mark that I was white. After being told to change my identifying information three separate times as my classmates watched, I broke. I felt my mouth start to tremble as I reluctantly erased my identifying race/ethnicity and changed my mark to white. I took my test that morning with one hand covering the top of my test in shame, only moving it to brush the

tears away so they didn't fall on my answer booklet. I believe settler innocence (Lees et al., 2021) manifested throughout my educational experiences growing up, as my teachers saw blue eyes and blonde hair and assumed that I was only white.

Today, teachers teach in modern school systems where the erasure of Indigenous cultures is subtle yet remain "deeply implicated in the logic of elimination and the "work" of settler colonial maintenance" (Sabzalian, 2019). This monumental event in my educational journey is nothing less than Indigenous erasure. Not only was my identity erased on my test in the physical sense, but I also scored in the top 90th percentile in the state on my test that year and my scores were not reported in the Native American demographic. As I grew up, I always recognized disconnects between the public schools and who I was as an Osage, but it wasn't until I began graduate school that I gained the knowledge to be able to explore Eurocentrism in education and to gain a deeper understanding of how Indigenous cultures are perceived and represented, or underrepresented, in the public schools.

As my educational journey to explore settler colonialism in education continued, I began to recognize settler innocence in education and how it is woven throughout education and teacher development and preparation. When I was approached by a fellow colleague who wanted to know more about why I incorporate Osage culture into my classroom and have an interest in supporting Native cultures, the familiar pangs of cultural misrepresentation and racism I experienced as a child came flooding back. I recognized that she, like my teacher from my childhood, assumed that I was only white and that she did not see any reason to teach about Indigenous cultures in her own classroom. These experiences further reinforced my personal reflections that mainstream education and teacher development are Eurocentric and support a Whitestream education and teacher development. I view the world I live in with an Indigenous

lens, and I recognize that my interactions with others only help to bring awareness and opportunities to change the educational narrative that supports all students and teachers.

Professional Subjectivity

Professionally, the past 15 years have been a continuous iteration of cultural reflection and constant self-discovery to make sense of Native culture in professional and educational spaces. My experience of teaching early childhood education in my community for 11 years, along with the opportunity to serve as an administrator for a tribal school have impacted and shaped the ways I view and approach Native cultures in educational spaces.

As with most first-year teachers, I stepped into my first teaching job feeling the overwhelming ambiguity of wanting to apply the textbook knowledge I acquired from my university education and grasping for basic teacher survival skills that are acquired only through real-life experience. Being hired the week before school started, I poured over the teaching manuals and guides left by the teacher before me and kept all my teacher education references neatly organized and readily accessible just in case I came across a situation that I hadn't learned about during my university teacher preparation courses.

As each year passed, I felt as if the more experienced teachers watched sympathetically as the "new teachers" earned their rites of passage navigating through their first year of teaching. Learning the atmosphere of the school and how those I share educational spaces with fit together was not something that I could have read anywhere; it was something I learned. Nearly every lesson plan, daily activity, and time management decision was structured around the district curricula for literacy and math, and for me, this academic structure continued for the next decade. With each new school year, I began to feel the undercurrent and pressures of mandated district testing, required literacy and math lessons and activities, teacher evaluation systems, the

ever-growing expectations to meet higher academic goals for my students, the spoken and unspoken expectations from administration to push myself harder year after year to be on more committees, and the limitations of professional autonomy to structure my own classroom. These factors began to overwhelmingly influence my professional decision-making on a daily basis. The ever-growing pressures to perform better and better each year in hopes to reach near-impossible teacher evaluation standards finally collided with the realization that I had become part of the very system that marginalized me as an Osage child years before. It was at that moment that I looked around my classroom at the unquestioning, innocent children entrusted to me and I realized that I was perpetuating the same Eurocentric ideologies that were modeled to me by my teachers growing up. I wondered if my classroom structure silently taught my students to set aside who they are each day as they entered a space to learn. I wondered if my Native students silently worked harder than their classmates, fighting to understand how to walk in both worlds from a learning environment that was built by a Eurocentric framework of instruction, just as I once did.

These experiences as a classroom teacher influenced how I approached culture in educational spaces, particularly when I stepped into the role of administrator at a nearby tribal early childhood development center and immersion school. As an Osage citizen, I wanted to create an environment that honored each child as present-day member of the cultures they represent, but I lacked the professional preparation from my university and professional development experiences to work with, for, and alongside culturally specific families and teachers. My coursework and training did not provide me with the skills needed to successfully work with students and staff outside of the white majority demographic. Navigating the written and unwritten rules and expectations of my professional role as an administrator uncovered a

very specific gap in the education offered to our Native children in Osage County. Specifically, my experience as a public school educator was working for a school district that hired highly qualified college graduates who could support strong academics and early childhood pedagogy but were not required to understand or provide cultural experiences for the students. On the other hand, my experience as a tribal administrator was to hire Osage or Native tribal members who may understand culture but were not required to have a college education or background in early childhood education, classroom management, or pedagogy.

Professionally, this vast disconnect between early childhood experiences offered in schools located just 45 miles apart in the same county, made me wonder how the schools in rural Osage County communities with a significant population of Native American children are prepared to teach and support our Native children. Gutierrez-Gomez (2012) asserts that,

> Teachers need to address the needs of all children, including American Indian children, by providing a solid educational experience infused with best practice and curriculum that is meaningful and that relates to children's lives (p. 202).

My experience, however, was far from this model of best practice. Culture was offered at the expense of high-quality academic teaching, supplemental resources and supports, and necessary services such as special education, speech, and physical/occupational therapy. Similarly, the latter was offered in the public school, but absent from the educational experience was Native cultural content and supports.

I continue to gravitate towards my own inquiry into Indigenous education and how to better understand the barriers that exist in our public school systems. My experiences as a professional in public school and tribal school settings have urged me to reimagine educational opportunities for our youngest learners, where academics and Native cultures are not separate

from one another. My experiences create a unique opportunity to better understand this gap in education that strive to contribute to the field of education.

Summary of Introduction

This chapter summarizes the rationale, purpose, and nature of this case study. The theoretical and methodological frameworks, the significance of this study, and acknowledgement of both personal and professional subjectivities have been discussed. Chapter 2 will provide the literature review related to the significance of this study.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review focuses on specific scholarship and relevant practitioner documents that support the purpose for this research study. Specifically, this literature review draws attention to what has been studied concerning Indigenous culture in the public school and curricula, and how educational systems prepare teachers to support Indigenous peoples and cultures in early childhood education classrooms. This literature review will provide the context in which this study is situated, specifically focusing on the importance of seeking to better understand the decision-making processes of early childhood teachers (ECE; pre-K through third grade) when constructing learning environments related to Indigenous cultures and peoples in selected Osage County schools in Oklahoma. This literature review will also provide significant underpinnings of the theoretical contexts in which this study is situated, along with providing insight into Indigenous culture as it intersects with the public education and teacher development. Since there currently exists major gaps in literature exploring the boundaries of Indigenous epistemology, schooling, and education in the 21st century (Smith, 2005), it is appropriate to acknowledge these theories, as well as the gaps that exist in order to develop a qualitative study that seeks to contribute to the field of education.

For this chapter, I will begin with a focus on a brief history of conquest and exploitation in American Indian education and move to policies impacting the education of Native American students from a national, state, and local Osage perspective. I will then discuss literature related to educator preparation and early childhood learning contexts before moving to a discussion of various critical Indigenous frameworks.

American Indian Education: A Brief History of Conquest and Exploitation

The history of American Indian education is complex and cannot be examined independent of a brief background of understanding that acknowledges European settlement and colonization. This section will briefly discuss American Indian education from a Nationwide-centered perspective, then transition into the Oklahoma-centered perspective, followed by Osage-centered perspectives and contexts, and finally discuss the current context locally.

A National Perspective

First and foremost, it is important to recognize that Indigenous education in the Americas existed in those respective communities prior to the arrival of Europeans. However, with the eventual establishment of the US Constitution, Native nations in the United States started to become entangled with these new systems through a series of law and policy developments.

The Indian Removal Act of 1830, signed by Andrew Jackson, authorized the president to grant unsettled lands west of the Mississippi River in exchange for Indian land in the east, and appropriations of $500,000 were given to assist tribes in their move westward (Carlson & Roberts, 2006). The Indian Removal Act of 1830 set in motion a discourse that frames the historical events and continues to frame the American narrative as a whole (Bowes, 2014). During this time, colonizing forces ensued and the United States government enacted policies that worked to relocate Native peoples from their lands, resulting in the interruption of the already advanced agriculture and cultivation systems, trade networks, well developed metalworks, weaving and pottery practices, and Indigenous understanding of herbal medicines, dentistry, surgery, and hygiene (McKay, 2020). Additionally, the education of Native children was deeply impacted by these historical events. Robert Utley, an American historian and author, stated that education "represented the most dangerous of all attacks on basic Indian values, the

one most likely to succeed in the end because it aimed at the children, who had known little if any of the old life" (Bureau of Indian Education, 2021).

With only 25 million acres of Indian Territory remaining near the turn of the century, Europeans contended that Indians were inferior to whites and did not have the capacity to take care of their own land and resources (McKay, 2020). However, by the late 1800s when the federal government continued to assert its power in attempts to civilize the Native peoples and develop schooling for Native Americans, Indigenous educational systems and infrastructures had already been in place since before European settlers' arrival and since time immemorial (Brayboy & Lomawaima, 2018; RedCorn, 2020; Pewewardy et al., 2018). The concerted effort to assimilate Native American children into the mainstream American culture began in the early 1800s through religious missions, but the effort is most often represented by the establishment of the Carlisle Indian School in 1879 by Henry Pratt, whose mission was to "kill the Indian, save the man" (NIEA, 2019; Carlisle Indian School Project, 2020).

During the 39 years of operation, the Carlisle Indian School boarded over 10,000 native children from more than 141 different tribes. The founders of the school believed that the native children needed to be "stripped of their savage customs and culture," taking away their Indigenous heritage (Carlisle Indian School Project, 2020). Additionally, Swisher et al. (1999) noted that the deep-rooted practices and ideas of past colonizers that were once deemed normal, continue to be prevalent in contemporary American Indian stereotypes. It wasn't until 1928 when the Meriam Report published the assessment of the Office of Indian Affairs, or what is today the Bureau of Indian Affairs, outlined how mission schools, boarding schools, and federal schools underserved Native children and allowed malnourishment, harsh discipline, physical abuse, and emotional trauma (Brayboy & Lomawaima, 2018).

Although these historical events have nevertheless impacted generations of Indigenous families, children, and education in the United States, it is important to note that the U.S. Supreme Court has affirmed that Native nations have the inherent right to self-governance and education (RedCorn et al., 2019). Today, there are over 600,000 American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students attending schools across the United States (RedCorn et al., 2019). Since sovereign Native nations have an inherent right, their authority is not less than that of state authority (RedCorn et al., 2019), and it is important to address the impacts of American Indian education from an Oklahoma perspective.

Oklahoma-Centered Perspective

These removal histories matter and are part of the entanglement of American narrative, and the forced migrations and relocation of Indians has impacted the last two centuries in ways scholars have not fully pursued (Bowes, 2014). Given the history of Oklahoma as Indian Territory, a landing place for forcibly removed nations from the east and north, and the tumultuous beginnings of statehood given the clear injustice upon Native nations and peoples, the survivance of Indigenous cultures and history is nonetheless prevalent in Oklahoma, and noteworthy. There are currently 39 Native nations within what is now called Oklahoma, with many developing education programs specific to cultural and linguistic revitalization. Some of those 39 nations, such as the Osage, are truly Indigenous to the area while many have endured forced removal from the east, creating a unique inter-tribal context across the state. However, gaps remain in seeking to better understand teacher perceptions of these various Indigenous cultures in the public school classrooms, as well as their preparedness to create culturally responsive learning environments.

Oklahoma is historically known as Indian Territory prior to becoming part of the United States in 1907. Before European colonization, tens of millions of Indigenous peoples inhabited and governed their own societies in North America (NCAI, 2019). There are 574 federally recognized Native nations in the United States, with 39 federally recognized Native nations located in Oklahoma (NCAI, 2020). Additionally, the U.S. population of American Indian/Alaska Natives has increased by 39% since the year 2000 (NCAI, 2019). Oklahoma is ranked among the top five states with the highest percentage of American Indian and Alaska Native students in the United States at 17.4%, only preceded by Alaska (27.9%), and followed by New Mexico (14.5%), South Dakota (12%), and Montana (9.2%) (NCAI, 2020). Oklahoma currently has 511 school districts and 965 elementary schools, with 99% of the school districts providing a public pre-kindergarten program (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019). The race and ethnicity of the students enrolled in Oklahoma are predominately White (47.93%), followed by Hispanic (18.16%), American Indian (12.85%), Two or More Races[4] (10.23%), Black (8.39%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (2.44%) (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019). Additionally, over 90% of Native students get their education in public school systems, and Oklahoma ranks in the top five states comprised of the largest Native student populations at 19% (NCAI, 2020).

The significance of this data shows that not only do families have access to early childhood education in public schools, but Oklahoma schools are providing education to a significant population of American Indian students by age four in early childhood classrooms. It

[4] A recent study found that many American Indian students are hidden in the 'two or more races' category in the Kansas Nebraska area (RedCorn et al., 2022; Osage Nation Membership/CDIB, 2020). A study specific to Oklahoma has not been found, but it is accurate to assume that American Indian students are hidden in the "two or more races" category, as well.

is also relevant to note that Oklahoma ranks third in the nation for adverse childhood experiences (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019), meaning Oklahoma children statistically experience trauma at a higher rate than anywhere else in the nation. This statistic is noteworthy given the contentious beginnings of Oklahoma statehood and the trauma experienced by the Indigenous peoples, and curriculum that positions Indigenous peoples in the past, or pre-1900 United States history context (Jacob et al., 2018). Oklahoma schools are in a unique position geographically to be connected and grounded in the cultures, histories, and current events of the Native nations of Oklahoma. It is suitable to acknowledge the existence of Indigenous students in our schools and citizens of our communities that provide educational opportunities that are about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures.

Osage-Specific Perspective

Osage County was established in 1907 at the time of Oklahoma statehood and is the largest county in Oklahoma. Osage County is named after the federally recognized Osage Nation, making up 2246.36 square miles (United States Census Bureau, 2020), or 1.47 million acres of land and water. There are 12 school districts that span across the open, rolling prairies of Osage County (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019), and of the 47,472 people living in Osage County, 15% are Native American or Alaska Native (United States Census Bureau, 2020). Not only are Indigenous cultures significant in the history of the state, but Indigenous cultures are very much interwoven into modern society and education. In 2020, student enrollment in Oklahoma public schools was 694,116 and 11.99% of those students were Native American (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2021). Further, of the 46,200 public school teachers employed in Oklahoma by 2012, 8.6% were American Indian or Alaska Native (NCES, 2012), the highest in the nation. The current Indigenous population of students and teachers in

public school education creates the space for qualitative research to better understand the intersection of teacher perceptions of confidence and preparedness to support Indigenous peoples and cultures. This is important because Indigenous knowledges give rise to new practices and visions of public education (Sabzalian, et al., 2018).

Acknowledging classroom teachers as the primary liaison between the families and the school is crucial in improving teacher development and cultural responsiveness. Sabzalian (2019) states,

> Knowledge of Native survivance, settler colonialism, and Native studies should be requisite teacher knowledge to counter deficit thinking, detect and interrupt settler colonial discourses in educational policy and thinking, and imagine and enact anticolonial and decolonial educational alternatives in public schools (p. 14).

Since 93% of Native children attend both rural and urban public schools (NIEA, 2019), there should be a constructive balance of both academia and Indigenous cultures that will yield productive, culturally aware citizens within our communities, and the purpose of this study is to better understand decision-making from early childhood teachers when it comes to curriculum and creating learning environments. This will help Osage and Oklahoma education stakeholders more appropriately advocate for Indigenous educational decision-making at the systemic level.

Drent and Dennison (2021) reiterate the importance of Native nations embracing change to support their values and needs, as well as reclaiming their histories, stories, and territories. Through the Osage principal of "moving to a new country" (p. 62), Drent and Dennison (2021) show how Osages have worked towards unity and order during times of colonialism and assimilation to reintroduce Indigenous values into modern governance (p. 62). Since a constitutional reform effort in 2004-2006 in the Osage Nation (Dennison, 2012) there has been a

dramatic growth in the amount of educational programming within the Osage government. Within the Osage Nation, there is an Education Department that offers a variety of programs to support pre-K through adult learning, and there is an Osage Nation Language Department tasked with revitalization of the Osage Language. These two departments have employees who work for the Osage Nation who also work in the public schools as liaisons and language teachers. Furthermore, as dictated by the Osage Nation 25-year strategic plan (Osage Nation, 2007; 2018; 2020), they have also created Osage-specific early learning environments through the Wahzhazhe Early Learning Academies and the new birth through fifth grade elementary school. As mentioned previously, these are clear indications that the Osage Nation has an interest in creating culturally responsive learning environments for their students; but as mentioned previously, many Osage and other Native students are attending early childhood learning options in the public schools found across the community.

Indigenous Perspectives in Rural Education

Rural schools differ in systems of organization, culture, and structure than nonrural schools and communities (Johnson & Howley, 2015). When taking rural perspectives into consideration, initiatives toward policy should be considered that address the rural strengths, opportunities, and challenges (Johnson & Howley, 2015). The intersection of Indigenous education and rural education show the need to ask critical questions about relationship building in ways that acknowledge separate but shared dynamics of political, cultural, social, and economic power within ongoing processes of colonization, assimilation, and dispossession (RedCorn et al., 2022). With the percentage of American Indian and Alaska Native students attending rural schools being nearly three times that of nonrural schools, there is a need to consider how the rural context is linked to the operation and organization of schooling for

Indigenous peoples (RedCorn et al., 2022). Furthermore, the concept of place based education within the Indigenous and rural contexts creates local personality through the connectedness to land and the living energy that exists, helping to create a better understanding of coexistence (RedCorn et al., 2022). RedCorn and colleagues (2022) identified four issues that are problematized and/or enhanced by critical Indigenous perspectives:

1. Rural Out-Migration
2. Rural Community Viability and Economics
3. Social Reproduction and Interruption
4. Increasing Diversity and Rural Cultural Adaptation (p. 244-245)

According to RedCorn et al. (2022), Rural Out-Migration refers to the search of economic and educational opportunities as the motivating factor to leave a rural place of origin (RedCorn et al., 2022). This tenet identified the need for research to explore this issue in rural-Indigenous communities, along with the influencing factors of land, economics, cultures, education, and sovereignty have on life processes (RedCorn et al., 2022). Further, the identification of Rural Community Viability and Economics in relation to Native nations identified the need to explore how sovereignty and economics are naturally part of discussions about rural and community sustainability (RedCorn et al., 2022). Additionally, the Social Reproduction and Interruption was identified as the rural schools' success being largely dependent on their ability to resist replicating nonrural schools and being able to focus on positioning community resources and assets to provide the educational experiences that are specific to cultural sovereignty, traditions, histories, and places (RedCorn et al., 2022). Lastly, Increasing Diversity and Rural Cultural Adaptation was identified through the changes over the recent decades in rural demographics occurring in communities as a result of economic

opportunities and recruitment outside the community, and critical Indigenous perspectives create the opportunity to teach concepts of adaptation and ways of community building (RedCorn et al., 2022). These tenets outline the issues that were identified through the intersection of Indigenous education and rural education. The concept of place based education shows the need for further exploration and research to understand the how all students in shared rural-Indigenous spaces can benefit from these systems (RedCorn et al., 2022).

Community Based Qualitative Research

Community based qualitative research (CBQR) does more than just identify and describe an issue, CBQR asserts that the researcher includes community members as active participants (Johnson, 2017). One of the primary goals for this type of research is to use the findings from the research to enact change to make improvements in the community through policy and programs (Johnson, 2017). Community based qualitative research situates the researcher in a position to take an active role to engage in reflection of participants' experiences and perspectives as community members, and to participate in the solution to problems (Johnson, 2017). Moreover, community based qualitative research requires intentionality and planning from the researcher and with the community, and as Johnson (2017) cautions, a community based qualitative research project would not be authentic or accurately reflect key issues specific to the community without first gaining community collaboration and input.

Community based qualitative research recommends that researchers orient themselves with the community through tours, exploration of landmarks and organizations, plotting relevant resources, attending local events, and to develop rapport with community members (Johnson, 2017). The data collection methods appropriate for this type of research include interviews, focus groups, participant observation, surveys, questionnaires, and visual data (Johnson, 2017). While

this study was not designed to fully employ community based qualitative research as a theoretical framework, underpinnings of CBQR were woven throughout this study to guide how this study remains cognizant of the research purpose to the local communities and ways to develop solutions that nurture partnerships between public schools and Native nations.

Policies Impacting the Education of Native American Students

Given the long histories of removal and location, the field of Indian education in the United States rests on a complicated network of bureaucracies and programming. The following legal foundations, policies, and programs are an attempt to provide a more appropriate and equitable education for Native students, particularly from the federal government. Many of these policies exist because of the federal trust responsibility, and funnel through a variety of bureaucracies depending on local contexts. In this section, the Federal Trust Responsibility, the Johnson O'Malley Act, and Every Student Succeeds Act will be outlined.

The Federal Trust Responsibility

The federal government entered into nearly 400 treaties with Native nations between 1787 and 1871, typically for tribal protection and well-being in exchange for land (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2022; RedCorn et al., 2019). Through a series of Supreme Court decisions in the first half of the 1800s known as the Marshall Trilogy, Native nations were considered domestic dependent nations, which meant that the federal government had a responsibility to uphold their sovereignty and protect it. Additionally, many treaties signed by Native nations and the US government involved the acquisition of land, in exchange for promises to provide resources for education, among other promises related to health and wellness. Although U.S. Congress passed the Indian Appropriations s Act of 1871, which formally ended the practice of signing treaties, the existing obligations to Native nations were

not invalidated (RedCorn et al., 2019). The federal trust responsibility is a source of federal responsibility to Native nations that requires and guarantees the federal government to support the tribal government and prosperity which ultimately protects Native nations and their sovereignty (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2022). In other words, the federal government's obligation to help provide Native nations with education remains. This federal obligation is carried out through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, however, since there are no Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools in or near Osage County, the state and local school districts have a responsibility to provide Native students with additional educational opportunities, and there are various federal programs to help do this (RedCorn et al., 2019).

Johnson O'Malley Act

In 1934, the Johnson O'Malley (JOM) Act was enacted by Congress and approved by the Bureau of Indian Education. Johnson O'Malley contracts for the education of Native students enrolled in public schools and offers programs in language, culture, academics, and dropout prevention (Bureau of Indian Education, 2021). Under the Johnson O'Malley Act, eligibility requires children to be between age three and grade twelve (Bureau of Indian Education, 2021). Successful Johnson O'Malley programs instill pride, tribal culture, and heritage lessons in the education curriculum, beginning in early childhood, and the purpose of the Johnson O'Malley (JOM) Act is to subsidize the education and other services provided by the states to Native American people, especially those not living on reservation land (Bureau of Indian Education, 2022). After four decades without any substantial changes, Congress updated the Johnson O'Malley Act in 2018 with the JOM Modernization Act (Federal Register, 2020). This update came after a series of consultations and public comment sessions and became published in March 2020 (Federal Register, 2020). Prior to this, JOM funding levels had been frozen at student count

levels from the 1990s, so the update allows for a more accurate accounting of students and affiliated funding for JOM moving forward.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Tribal Consultation

Title VI of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has specific programs for funding American Indian education programs specifically designed to meet the unique needs for Native students in public schools. There are several overlapping programs, and ESSA has several sections that matter to Indian Education (Northwest Comprehension Center, 2015). Beginning in 2017, under section 8538 of ESSA, tribal consultation is required for states with Title VI programs and Title I grants (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2016). Tribal consultation is the formal process between the local educational agencies (LEA) that serve American Indian and Alaska Native students and tribal agencies and is required of any local education agency receiving more than $40,000 in Title VI funding or with an enrollment of at least 50% American Indian or Alaska Native students (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2016). The purpose of tribal consultations is to create an opportunity for Oklahoma's American Indian student population to be enhanced by local education agencies (LEAs) consulting with Native nations to improve Native students' academic outcomes (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2016). There are currently 204 school districts in Oklahoma that participate in tribal consultation (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2016), and during the 2018-2019 academic school year, Oklahoma public schools had 403 Title VI Indian Education programs (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019).

While tribal consultation creates the opportunity for discourse between LEAs and tribal agencies and organizations, the ultimate goal is to support the academic success of Native American and Alaska Native students. While there are Title VI and JOM programs in Osage

County, there is little research on how these programs may or may not affect classroom level decision-making, specifically, in early childhood education.

Oklahoma Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Evaluation System

Historically, Oklahoma has struggled with teacher retention and recruitment, ranking 48th in the nation for teacher salary, and has only recently received a pay increase in 2018 after lawmakers approved the first tax increase in 28 years (National Education Association, 2018). With many of the state's teachers moving to better paid states or leaving the profession altogether, the number of emergency certified teachers jumped from 97 for the 2012-2013 academic school year to 3,320 in 2019-2020 (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019). According to the Oklahoma State Department of Education, emergency certificates are issued for one year on an emergency basis to a person who has not met the certification requirements for a state-approved program (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019). Additionally, a report by Mathematica Policy Research (2016) shows that Native American and Alaska Native youth are 2.5 times more likely to experience trauma than their non-Native peers (Lechner et al., 2016). The rate of post-traumatic stress disorder for Native American and Alaska Native children who have been exposed to violence is three times higher than the general population and is comparable to veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan (Lechner et al., 2016). While emergency certifications may seem to temporarily fix a teacher shortage on the public school side, it exacerbates the issue of providing students with learning opportunities that are stable and consistent from highly qualified teachers, or more specifically, teachers who are skilled in working with students experiencing trauma or adverse childhood experiences. In addition, mandating a teacher and leader evaluation system that lacks embedded support for Indigenous students may only aggravate the historical trauma, or the long-term intergenerational impact

caused from colonization, historical oppression, and cultural suppression of Indigenous people (Kirmayer et al., 2014).

The Oklahoma Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Evaluation System policy was adopted by the Oklahoma Board of Education and the current law states that all evaluations of teachers and leaders, or administrators, in Oklahoma public schools will be evaluated using this model (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2019), and is one of the rubrics approved for schools to use for teacher observation and evaluation. The TLE observation and rubric for teacher evaluation breaks down the expectations in five weighted domains, with each domain comprised of dimensions.

Specific attention should be drawn to Dimension 8 (Current State Standards), Dimension 17 (Professional Development), and Dimension 18 (Professional Accountability). Teachers are evaluated on their instructional effectiveness of current state standards, and while some state standards were recently updated to reflect more appropriate Indigenous representation in Oklahoma, it is unrealistic to think these new standards received much attention during the COVID pandemic. Some social studies standards were recently updated and approved by the Oklahoma State Legislature in May 2019 to reflect a more appropriate Indigenous representation in Oklahoma (OCSS, 2019). While professional development and professional accountability make up a large portion of teacher instructional effectiveness, this undefined dimension creates a unique niche to explore the intersection of professional development and accountability specific to Indigenous peoples and cultures.

The table below outlines the observation and evaluation rubric that schools use to evaluate teacher performance in public schools. This outline shows the weighted domains and the dimensions within each domain that school administrators use to assess teachers' classroom

management, instructional effectiveness, professional growth and continuous development, interpersonal skills, and leadership involvement. The significance of including this rubric is to show the specific areas that teachers know they are going to be evaluated, and the type of performance they are expected to demonstrate to meet expectations.

Table 2

TLE Teacher Observation and Evaluation Rubric

Domain	**Relative Weight**	**Dimension**
Classroom Management	30%	1. Preparation 2. Discipline 3. Building-Wide Climate Responsibility 4. Lesson Plans 5. Assessment Practices 6. Student Relations
Instructional Effectiveness	50%	7. Literacy 8. Current State Standards 9. Involves All Learners 10. Explains Content 11. Clear Instruction & Directions 12. Models 13. Monitors 14. Adjusts Based upon Monitoring 15. Establishes Closure 16. Student Achievement
Professional Growth and Continuous Improvement	10%	17. Professional Development 18. Professional Accountability
Interpersonal Skills	5%	19. Effective Interpersonal Skills
Leadership	5%	20. Professional Involvement & Leadership

An exploratory look at HB-2957 defining the teacher evaluation system helped to put this policy into perspective. Of the 38 Oklahoma State Representatives and two Oklahoma Senators authoring the bill, 35 were white males, five were white females, and none of the authors

claimed citizenship or affiliations to any Native nation or tribal entity based on their title or online biographies (Oklahoma State Legislature, 2021). The lack of Indigenous representation could be an implication of the lack of Indigenous support in Oklahoma public school classrooms and is certainly reflective of the policies that Oklahoma public schools are using to measure teacher and student success.

With Oklahoma schools struggling to provide adequate teacher pay that retain and recruit teachers, educators are likely focusing solely on the requirements of the policy, leaving little time to implement new, unmandated practices in the classroom. It is interesting to note that white students make up less than half of the student demographic for Oklahoma student enrollment, while predominately white males authored the policy. To a large extent, state policymakers are creating policies with settler-colonialism underpinnings, which continue to perpetuate the removal of Indigenous culture and continue the cycle of historical trauma among Native American and Alaska Native students.

While the implementation of the Oklahoma Teacher and Leader Evaluation Effectiveness System (TLE) establishes a uniform baseline for public school teachers to exemplify their effectiveness, gaps still remain in the model that make it inapplicable and ineffective to measure teacher effectiveness and student outcomes in terms of Indigenous culture and support. Since Oklahoma is rich in Indigenous culture, and home to 39 federally recognized tribes (NCAI, 2020), it is appropriate for leaders to reexamine the appropriateness of the current evaluation system that determines teacher and leader effectiveness. To further understand the implications of the teacher and leader evaluation policy, a brief analysis of the requirements for teacher candidates at the university level revealed that teachers coming from the Oklahoma teacher pipeline are not prepared at the university level to teach about, for, or with Indigenous

communities. This repeated cycle of omitting Indigenous cultures at the university level produces teachers and leaders who are not equipped to work with students and families with an Indigenous lens and understanding. Additionally, this cycle is further compounded when the policies created and mandated by the state of Oklahoma lack Indigenous representation or visibility when determining the quality and effectiveness of our teachers and leaders.

Teacher Preparation in Secondary Education Institutions

With the Oklahoma evaluation policy in place, it is appropriate to further examine to what extent Oklahoma universities are preparing teacher candidates to support Indigenous culture. There are 25 colleges and universities in the state of Oklahoma, which includes two research universities, 10 regional universities, one public liberal arts university, and 12 community colleges (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2021). For the 2018-2019 academic school year, there were 172,525 in-state students enrolled in Oklahoma's college and universities in the field of education, with 14,503 of those students being American Indian or Alaska Native (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2021). According to the Oklahoma Teacher Supply and Demand report from 2019, almost half of all Oklahoma teacher graduates receive their teacher education from the University of Central Oklahoma, Oklahoma State University, and Northeastern State University (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019). These universities are within driving distance from Osage County.

Colleges and universities in Oklahoma have the opportunity to prepare teacher candidates to be effective teachers in Oklahoma public schools, where there are high populations of Indigenous students and families. A brief exploration of the top three universities in Oklahoma supplying Oklahoma public schools with the most teacher graduates show a lack of exposure to Indigenous cultures and topics within their education requirements found in their core

curriculum. With 172,525 in-state students enrolled in the field of education in Oklahoma colleges and universities (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019), it is relevant to assume that teacher candidates are prepared by higher education to support all learners, Indigenous learners included, in public school classrooms. However, an informal scan for the words, “Indigenous,” “culture,” “American Indian,” “tribe,” or, “Native,” in the elementary teacher education requirement courses did not indicate that these terms were part of the academic course plans for these universities (Northeastern State University, 2021; OSU Academic Catalog, 2021; UCO Elementary Education, 2021).

Today, there are over 600,000 Native American and Alaska Native students attending public schools in kindergarten through 12th grade in the United States (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2000). If Indigenous histories, cultures, and languages are not intentionally embedded in modern day classrooms and coupled with the lack of interest in wanting to learn about the history, the erasure of Native culture is perpetuated. Therefore, it is appropriate to examine teacher perceptions of confidence and preparedness to make decisions and create learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures.

Indigenous Cultures in Early Childhood Classrooms

The field of early childhood education is unique in that its emphases are centered around child development from birth to eight years old. Early childhood education focuses on brain development during the critical years when children are forming their foundations of social, emotional, and cognitive development, along with developing moral outlooks, self-esteem, and world perceptions (Early Childhood and Family Education, 2019). It is important to emphasize this time of critical development in children’s early years to create learning environments that are developmentally appropriate and support healthy perceptions of the world that influence

outcomes as adults. As Faircloth (2015) notes, designing an approach for school readiness that includes parents, families, Native nations, schools, and communities to incorporate knowledge, respect, and culture that will support student achievement must begin early in the lives of our children. In order to rectify educational disparities, it is critical to explore teacher perceptions of confidence and preparedness in making curricular decisions and creating learning environments that are about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures. A recent study that examined representations of Native Americans in classroom libraries found that multicultural books make up a small fraction of the literary selections, and that books about Native Americans are effectively absent (Chaudhri & Schau, 2015). Since children associate that what they read about in books must be worth writing about and ultimately matter, the lack or absence of Native American literature available for children to identify with for themselves or their friends is significant (Chaudhri & Schau, 2015). Further, the vast majority of literary selections that are available to teachers are written by cultural outsiders and are typically misrepresented and associated with holidays, such as Thanksgiving and Columbus Day, and "many contain stereotypical images, biased or prejudiced language, one-dimensional characters, and formulaic plots" (Chaudhri & Schau, 2015, p. 21).

Although early childhood education is typically associated with pre-K and kindergarten, early childhood education in the public school system encompasses pre-K through third grade (Early Childhood and Family Education, 2019). As part of this critical development, early childhood classrooms are designed to allow young children to engage in construction of knowledge through developmentally appropriate learning environments that support exploratory play, interaction with the physical environment, and honoring culture and family as first teachers (Early Childhood and Family Education, 2019). As teachers work to create learning

environments that support developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood, responding to culture and diversity may be one of the most challenging for teachers to establish, given that the space for early childhood teacher education in the United States has historically been dominated by white, English-speaking, middle-class views (Cheruvu et al., 2015). In a recent report from the National Center for Education Statistics, research showed that nearly 79% of all public school teachers were white, with an average of 21 students per self-contained classroom in primary grades (Taie & Goldring, 2020). The early childhood education workforce should, ideally, reflect the cultural composition of the children enrolled in the classrooms, and the effort to recruit early childhood education teachers of ethnic minority needs to be made (Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002). When children can relate and identify to cultures similar to their own, academic scores increase, as well as supporting and validating children's own cultural identities. As Faircloth (2015) notes, there is a lack of studies that assess the curriculum development in the early childhood programs that serve Native children, and students will be better prepared academically in the education system when high quality education includes the incorporation of Indigenous cultures for Indigenous students.

The Osage Nation developed a 25-year strategic plan in 2007 as a policy guide to address the present and future needs, and the Osage Nation has recently published a comprehensive update. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that among the priorities of the Osage people, providing more support for preschool education ranked within the top ten priorities in the area of education (Osage Nation, 2007; 2018; 2020). While there is strong emphasis and support for early childhood education, the Osage Nation Head Start centers across Osage County were recently closed and programs were not renewed by the Osage Nation in 2020 due to budgeting shortfalls (Duty, 2020). With these Head Start centers closing, eligible Osage and Native children could

enroll in one of the four Osage Nation ran Wahzhazhe Early Learning Academies located in Skiatook, Hominy, Pawhuska, and Fairfax. The shift from federal programming to tribally-ran local early learning centers corresponds with the Osage Nation's aim to center sovereignty. While this shift does achieve a more tribal authority, the reality is that these learning centers are limited in space and have a limited number of children who can enroll, typically through a first-come, first-served basis or waiting lists. As the Osage Nation works to take steps in a positive direction in education of their youngest citizens, resources are limited, and many Osage and Native children and families rely on the state-run public schools for education and support. Since the closing of the Osage Nation Head Start centers, the number of Osage and Native children who transitioned into the local preschool classrooms has increased in the past year, creating the space for qualitative inquiry that intentionally examines teacher perceptions of confidence and preparedness to make curricular decisions and create learning environments about, for, and with Indigenous peoples and cultures in the early childhood public school classrooms.

Overall, through the new Osage constitution and the 25-year strategic plan (Osage Nation, 2007; 2018; 2020), it is clear that the Osage Nation has an interest in moving cultural and linguistic knowledges into the future and creating more culturally responsive early childhood learning environments are part of that plan. This study acknowledges this, and also acknowledges the reality that many early childhood students in Osage county public schools are Osage citizens, and the Osage Nation has an inherent right to be involved in the education of their citizens. The fact that they are in public schools is an inherited entanglement that requires leaders to look beyond strict interpretations of jurisdiction and consider the cross-institutional nature of Osage education in trying to improve Osage learning environments.

Critical Indigenous Frameworks

The critical Indigenous theories and frameworks that are be discussed in this study worked to identify and interrogate settler-colonial power that is embedded in education or other institutions. It is important to acknowledge the support these frameworks offer to educational leaders, literature, and educational research. In this section, I will introduce Transformational Indigenous Praxis (Pewewardy et al., 2018), Red Pedagogy (Grande, 2000), Insurgent Research (Gaudry, 2011), Tribal Critical Race Theory (Brayboy, 2006), *Liberating Sovereign Potential* (RedCorn, 2020), Settler Innocence (Lees et al., 2021), and Perceived Self-Efficacy (Bandura, 2012).

Transformational Indigenous Praxis

The *Transformational Indigenous Praxis* is a model created by Pewewardy et al. (2018) to promote cultural consciousness and critical awareness among educators, and to help begin the conversation about Indigenous education within their own communities. Pewewardy et al. (2018) noted the struggles that Indigenous communities have faced, both historically and ongoing, in the "whitestream," or settler-designed school systems in the United States (Pewewardy et al., 2018). The *Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model* (TIPM) is designed to support educators in indigenizing and decolonizing their educational practices by providing the framework for Eurocentric knowledge to be challenged (Pewewardy et al., 2018). According to the TIPM, tribal sovereignty must include educational sovereignty and the principles of decolonization are outlined in four stages:

1. Contributions,
2. Additive,
3. Transformation, and

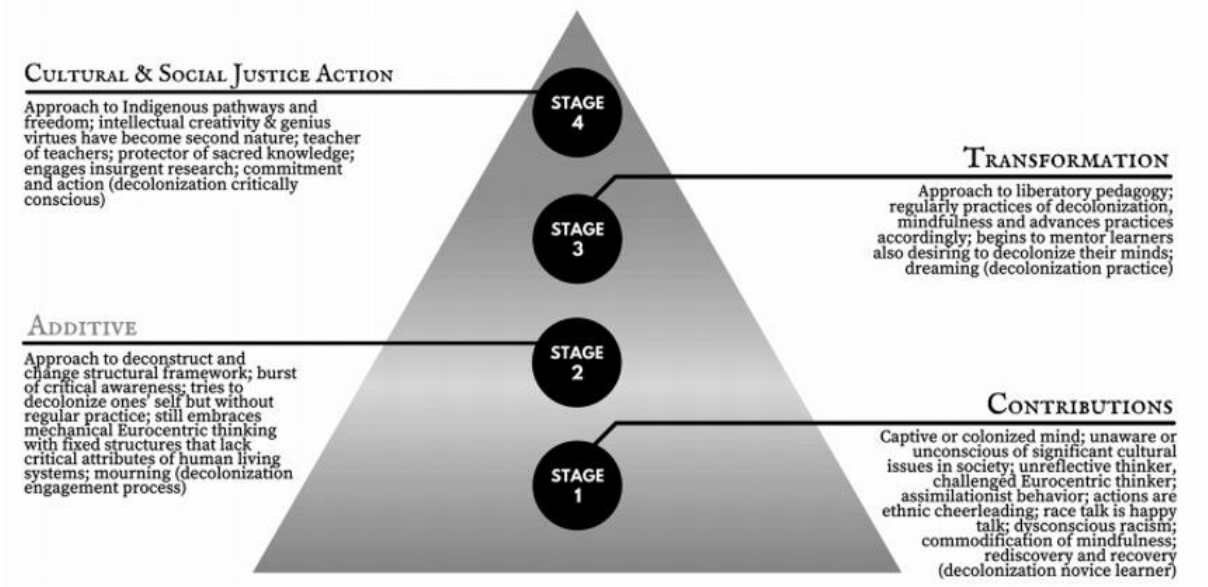
4. Cultural and Social Justice Action (Pewewardy et al., 2018).

Additionally, a recent publication was released that supports critical consciousness concerning decolonization in education. Pewewardy et al. (2022) asserted that educators can support students' critical thinking skills when teachers unsettle settler-colonialism in education and school experiences. The concept of wave jumping demonstrates that even when facing resistance, educators can gain momentum with time and energy when working to decolonize their instruction (Pewewardy et al., 2022).

The figures below show the models of *Transformational Indigenous Praxis* (Pewewardy et al., 2018) and *How Wave Jumping Can Speed Up Your Transformational Indigenous Praxis Progress* (Pewewardy et al., 2022).

Figure 1

Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model

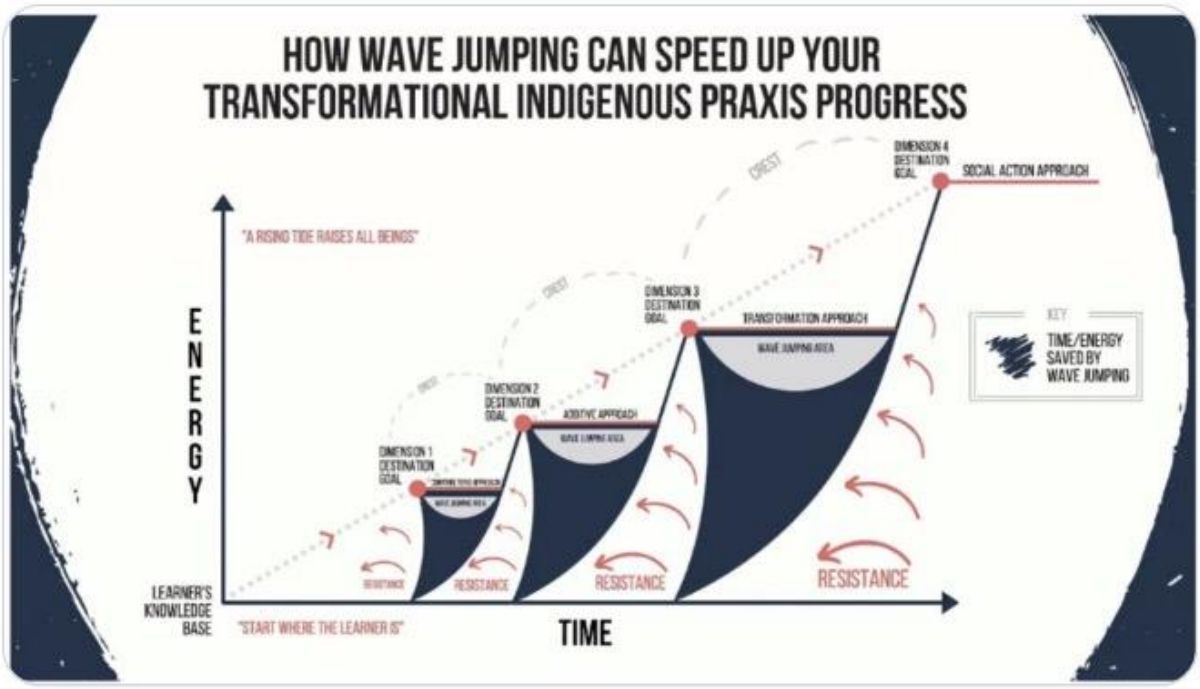


Note: Figure 1 illustrates the four stages of cultural consciousness and critical awareness. Figure 2 illustrates how educators can gain momentum moving forward with energy and time when

working to decolonize their practice in education, even with facing resistance (Pewewardy et al., 2022).

Figure 2

How Wave Jumping Can Speed Up Your Transformational Indigenous Praxis Progress



Red Pedagogy

Red Pedagogy is a critical Indigenous theory by Sandy Grande that focuses on tribal liberation and identity by analyzing the potential of identity theory, essentialist theory, postmodern theory, and critical identity theory (Grande, 2000). Red Pedagogy creates the space for engagement in American Indian intellectualism and academia to be able to explore the ways Western theory can be dismantled (Grande, 2000). According to this theory, Red Pedagogy creates the space for American Indian scholars to strive to dismantle Western theory and work toward Indigenous self-determination. Within Red Pedagogy dominant discourses and theories are challenged, calling attention to the urgency to build solidarity within Indigenous

communities which works against Eurocentric dominance, and strives toward Indigenous liberation (Grande, 2000). Specifically, Grande asserts that in terms of American Indian scholarship, whitestream dominance works against Indigenous scholars and intellectual sovereignty to sustain the validity of white scholarship (Grande, 2000). Additionally, the nuance of respectability and legitimacy within American Indian communities and whitestream academia is addressed, and how the space for American Indian intellectualism is already drafted by colonialism and the romantic narrative of American Indians as savages and ignoring the history surrounding the First Nations (Grande, 2000). Red Pedagogy is an Indigenous theory that contributes to literature and academia by acknowledging the shortcomings of other theories which unknowingly contribute to the absorption or loss of American Indian distinctiveness as sovereign people (Grande, 2000).

Grande (2008) notes that Red Pedagogy creates awareness of disagreements about inconsistencies in the world and informs decolonization. This framework also requires an understanding of skills needed to untangle the implications of colonialist thinking and is centered around three specific tenets listed by Grande (2008):

1. The subjection of the processes of whitestream schooling to critical pedagogical analysis,
2. The decoupling and de-thinking of education from its Western, colonialist contexts, including revolutionary critical pedagogy,
3. The conceptualization of Indigenous efforts to reground students and educators in traditional knowledge and teachings (p. 244).

Additionally, this framework requires that Indigenous peoples engage in self-definition and acknowledge that sovereignty of Native peoples and connection to spirituality are guiding forces

(Grande, 2008). Further, Grande (2008) offers seven principles as a way to think about decolonization in American education:

1. Red pedagogy is primarily a pedagogical project.
2. Red pedagogy is fundamentally rooted in Indigenous knowledge and praxis.
3. Red pedagogy is informed by critical theories of education.
4. Red pedagogy promotes an education for decolonization.
5. Red pedagogy is a project that interrogates both democracy and Indigenous sovereignty.
6. Red pedagogy actively cultivates praxis of collective agency.
7. Red pedagogy is grounded in hope (p. 250).

According to Grande (2008), Red Pedagogy offers the framework to decolonize and reclaim what it means to have Indigenous sovereignty. As Grande's (2000) narrative and research states,

> I believe that the time is ripe for American Indian peoples and scholars to engage in critical exchange and educational theory, to work hard at redefining the relationship between the academy and tribal America, between theoretical work and revolutionary struggle, and to infuse and further complicate the questions of liberty, democracy, and equity with Indigenous theories grounded in the Earth and its knowledge (p. 357).

Insurgent Research

Gaudry (2011) asserts that insurgent research is an approach to research that focuses on recentering community and is rooted in Indigenous methodologies by employing four key principles:

1. Research is grounded in, respects, and ultimately seeks to validate Indigenous worldviews.

2. Research output is geared toward use by Indigenous peoples and in Indigenous communities.
3. Research processes and final products are ultimately responsible to Indigenous communities, meaning that Indigenous communities are the final judges of the validity and effectiveness of insurgent research.
4. Research is action oriented and work as a motivating factor for practical and direct action among Indigenous peoples and in Indigenous communities (Gaudry, 2011, p. 117).

Insurgent research is specific in that it acknowledges the limitations of the extraction methodology, wherein the participants of the research are rarely considered to be the primary audience, and the research being done is *on* a marginalized group as objects of the research (Gaudry, 2011). This means that research findings that focus on Indigenous peoples as outsiders are translated into the worldview of the dominant culture, reinforcing the colonist claim that Indigenous understanding and ways of being are not respected or justifiable in their own right (Gaudry, 2011). However, insurgent research is different from extractive research in that insurgent research operates within the values determined by the relationship to the Indigenous community and functions withing the decolonization movement (Gaudry, 2011). Researchers dedicated to insurgent research have a sense of responsibility to the Indigenous community or have an ethical responsibility of their accountability to community (Gaudry, 2011). Insurgent research is community based, and aims to reclaim and make valid Indigenous knowledges and build harmonious relationships (Gaudry, 2011)

Tribal Critical Race Theory

Tribal Critical Race Theory, or TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2006), is also relevant to the context of this study. Critical Race Theory was founded by Derrick Bell Jr., which emphasizes racial inequities and social oppression (Bhattacharya, 2017). Critical Race Theory is grounded in the experiences of people of color while "challenging taken-for-granted ideas about accepting the experiences of whites as the norm" (Kim, 2016). From Critical Race Theory, Brayboy (2016) developed the framework of Tribal Critical Race Theory, or TribalCrit, which is rooted in Indigenous communities and individuals. According to Brayboy, the nine tenets of TribalCrit include:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, white supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized nature of our identities.
4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.
6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
7. 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.

8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real, and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.
9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change (Brayboy, 2006, p. 429-430).

Within Brayboy's theory, these tenets have informed my thinking about critical work related to Indigenous contexts. Specifically, while I do not explicitly employ these throughout the research design, his tenets are rooted in Indigenous communities and individuals, which still informs my approach to this study.

Liberating Sovereign Potential Model

The *Liberating Sovereign Potential* model is a working model designed to help leaders conceptualize and navigate the educational systems and governmental realities inherent within the fields of Indigenous education (RedCorn, 2020). Central to this model is the assumption that the specific revitalization efforts made by each Indigenous community must be understood in relation to the goals, resources, and locally defined needs, and motivate the work that pushes against the assimilationist status quo. Additionally, RedCorn states (2020) states:

> This is also at the heart of this model…the need for leaders working within Indigenous education contexts to (re)center their systems thinking around the culture and governance systems within Native Nations, and make leadership decisions accordingly (RedCorn 2020, p. 3).

The *Liberating Sovereign Potential* model is especially relevant to this research study as it acknowledges that teacher knowledge and experience are heavily influenced by settler-colonial systems and perspectives, and that pedagogical decisions are centered around settler-colonial primacies (RedCorn, 2020). Additionally, RedCorn notes that in order to liberate educational

sovereignty, intellectual sovereignty must first be unlocked so that cultural knowledge can extend through the system as a whole, as well as influence outside systems, such as teaching styles, pedagogy, curriculum, and leadership styles (RedCorn, 2020). RedCorn's work is imperative in understanding the underpinnings that are actively, and uniquely, present within the education of Native students. RedCorn further asserts that in order to engage in (re)centering, there are specific items that need to be considered (RedCorn, 2020):

1. Assess the Educational Landscape and Identify Community Assets
2. Foster Professional Growth Across Systems
3. Systems Development and Alignment
4. Foster a Healthy Community of Practice Across All Systems

Assess the Educational Landscape and Identify Community Assets

In RedCorn's (2020) first tenet, he points out that assessing the landscape should have a strong focus on collective reflection and locating the substantial areas of need, as outlined:

1. Mapping Educational Systems of Influence and Access Points
2. Identify Skilled and Knowledgeable Educators within Community Cultural Systems
3. Identify Skilled and Knowledgeable Educators Working Within Native Nation's Governance Structures
4. Assess Level of Native Representation (Including Allies) in Community's Professional Educator Ecosystem
5. Assess Level of Critically Conscious Collective Efficacy Across Educator Ecosystem
6. Identify and Prioritize Areas of Need for Fostering Professional Growth (p. 9-14).

While these areas do not need to be assessed in order, they are provided as a guideline for Native and non-Native leaders working in Indigenous communities to assess the connectedness to a

nation's ability to diverge from an assimilationist path and its ability to (re)center their systems of education. RedCorn (2020) urges leaders to take a look at the larger professional "ecosystem" of educators, including superintendents, principals, teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, program coordinators, and board members, for example, in order to gain a better understanding of a Nation's sovereign potential and to identify entry points to influence change. Additionally, RedCorn (2020) cautions that decentering whiteness is not an easy process, and leaders should be mindful to recognize individuals who limit educational sovereignty. These individuals can be non-Native individuals who have well-meaning intentions, or they could be Native individuals not willing to deepen their own critical consciousness. Developing relationships and allies are recommended to support this tenet.

Foster Professional Growth Across Systems

This tenet acknowledges that the power of education ultimately lies in the interaction of the teachers and students within a school system (RedCorn, 2020), and that leaders should address the following:

1. Identify Institutions, Access Points, and Resources to Foster Professional Growth Across Systems
2. Look to Existing Resources and Programs within the Nation
3. Identify Professional Development Access Points in External Institutions
4. Identify Institutions of Higher Education to Build Pathways to the Profession
5. Scan for Resources, Leverage Opportunities
6. Recruit from Within the Community for Participation in Programs
7. Execute Programs with a Focus on Flexibility, Growth, and Ongoing Communication

8. Manage Professional Transitions and Maintain Ongoing Learning with Mentorship, Coaching, a Health School Culture, and Operations and Management Decisions (p. 14-19).

These guidelines are significant to fostering professional growth across systems, and specifically acknowledges that interactions between teachers and students are not only the core of a school system, but it is also the "true power of education" (RedCorn, 2020, p. 14). High quality teachers and leaders have the ability to improve student learning, and this tenet acknowledges that considerations need to be taken to develop and build pathways to the teaching profession. Additionally, RedCorn (2020) asserts with the guidelines of this tenet that leaders should build professional growth that specifically addresses:

a. increasing linguistic and cultural knowledge, skills, and fluency,
b. enhancing critically conscious collective efficacy and CSRP (culturally sustaining revitalizing pedagogies) skill sets across the educator ecosystem,
c. filling educator specialty positions of need (certified and noncertified) in long-term and sustainable ways, and,
d. build pathways to the profession and feed the educator ecosystem with skilled and knowledgeable professionals and change agents (p. 14).

Systems Development and Alignment

RedCorn (2020) identifies this tenet as one of the most important within this model and can be further defined by the following categories:

1. Aligning Legal, Political, and Jurisdictional Structures
2. Development and Alignment of Curriculum and Teaching Resources (p. 20-22).

According to RedCorn (2020), this tenet the backbone of systems alignment and development work, which ultimately empowers educators to realign and (re)center within the Nation. Additionally, this tenet draws attention to the need for reflection on educational influence and the need to align curricula to the center of the Nation. Specifically, this tenet acknowledges that teachers, including Native teachers, are obligated by policy to carry out Eurocentric curriculum with Eurocentric resources, and ultimately urges educators to critically reflect on who developed the materials, which community assets can be leveraged, how can settler-colonial contexts be changed to Indigenous contexts without altering standards, and where are the access points across systems that allow leaders to influence change with curriculum, committees, and resources (p. 22).

Foster a Healthy Community of Practice Across All Systems

RedCorn's (2020) last tenet is one that should be ongoing for leaders to continue the practice of developing a healthy community across systems of learning (p. 22). By fostering a healthy community of practice across all systems, it creates opportunities to keep leaders and teachers connected to each other, as well as being able to continue ongoing learning and elevating skills and resources to support culturally sustaining revitalizing pedagogies and learning environments.

By using RedCorn's model as a framework, I situate my research to be able to gain a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions of confidence and preparedness to make curricular decisions and create learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures. I plan to use RedCorn's tenet 1 (2020), but I hope to use other tenets to inform what could happen with my findings. This framework will be used to guide my research study as it relates to the educational equity of Indigenous students.

Primarily, Assess the Educational Landscape and Identify Community Assets is the tenet that can be directly tied to teacher confidence and teacher leadership. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion on how the other components of the model could be affected by findings.

The figure below illustrates how Native nations are at the center of *Liberating Sovereign Potential*. This visualization illustrates how RedCorn's (2020) tenets are interconnected work together to ultimately liberate sovereign potential.

Figure 3

Liberating Sovereign Potential Model

Settler Colonialism and Settler Innocence in Education

It is important to acknowledge the diverse perspectives of those involved in early childhood education, as well as teacher professional development. As indicated by the literature previously discussed in this chapter, educational policies and practices have and are currently dominated by Eurocentric curriculum and predominantly non-Native teachers and policy makers. Further, subtle forms of racism remain in education through false messages that are being taught in current education which create dysconsciousness that attempt to destroy Indigenous culture (Pewewardy et al., 2018).

Settler colonialism is described as a form of colonization where outsiders come to a land that is already inhabited by Indigenous peoples with the purpose of pursuing the new land and resources and claiming the land for themselves as their own new home (Tuck et al., 2014). Although settler colonialism is generally viewed from a historical lens, settler colonialism in modern day is evidenced by the refusal to recognize oneself as such, denial of history and the Indigenous peoples' resistance to settlement and claims of stolen land, and denial that settler colonialism is ongoing today and not contained in the past (Tuck et al., 2014). Lees et al. (2021) describe a process known as settler innocence, in which the modern-day white population perceives themselves as not responsible for the historical and present colonial structures, thereby overlooking the violence that it maintains, and further, having no interest in knowing or coming to know. They state,

> Settler colonialism is marked by the permanent move of mostly European settlers into other territories that requires the ongoing displacement and/or elimination of Indigenous peoples, the enslavement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples from Africa, and the individual ownership of land for capital gain. This displacement and elimination take

> place in the curriculum with an impact on what is learned and not learned in schools (Lees et al., 2021, p. 1).

It is critical to expose these attitudes regarding Indigenous culture to construct accurate knowledge and ways to support culture in the classroom as well as teacher development at the university and other professional development contexts.

The concept of settler colonialism and settler innocence can be recognized, and further perpetuated, by those in power when curricular content is questioned. The recent debate surrounding Critical Race Theory being taught in schools has become a major focus in the field of education. Disagreements about what Critical Race Theory is exist in regard to shaping public policy and assumptions about divisive underpinnings, and can even be viewed as a way to pit people of color against white people (Sawchuk, 2021), causing superintendents, principals, teachers, and law makers to engage in discourse about what is acceptable to teach in schools. Through centuries of white dominance and settler innocence, policymakers and institutions continue to inadvertently mispresent and support Indigenous children and cultures. Settler colonialism is perpetuated by teaching that historical actions took place as unfortunate events that were necessary for the birth of a new nation, without societies considering that they live on land that was stolen or acquired through broken treaties, or to which Indigenous peoples have an ontological and cosmological relationship (Tuck et al., 2014). Settler colonial societies consequently cover the tracks of settler colonialism by recounting colonization as being elsewhere and not in the here and now, and that settler colonial societies are superior and at the center of all typologies, including ideology, force, policy, and law (Tuck et al., 2014). I will use settler innocence (Lees et al., 2019) as a framework to guide my study to better understand

teacher perceptions of confidence, efficacy, and preparedness to support Indigenous peoples and cultures in early childhood classrooms.

Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Efficacy

Within the context of Social Cognitive Theory, Bandura (2012) defines self-efficacy as a person's beliefs in their capability to produce a given accomplishment. Bandura's (1977) theory suggests that behaviors are interpreted through four mediational processes, including how well the behavior grabs one's attention, how well the behavior is remembered, the ability to reproduce the behavior, and the will or motivation to perform the behavior. Additionally, the sources of self-efficacy are developed in four ways: mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and physical and emotional states (Bandura, 2012).

Mastery experiences refer to the success and results of an experience. If a person experiences successes easily with quick results, they are likely to be easily discouraged when setbacks and failures are experiences. Conversely, resiliency requires experiences of overcoming obstacles through perseverance, and learning how to manage failure in ways that are informative and not demoralizing (Bandura, 2012). Social modeling is described as seeing the success of people who are similar to oneself and striving to succeed through effort and belief in one's own capabilities (Bandura, 2012).

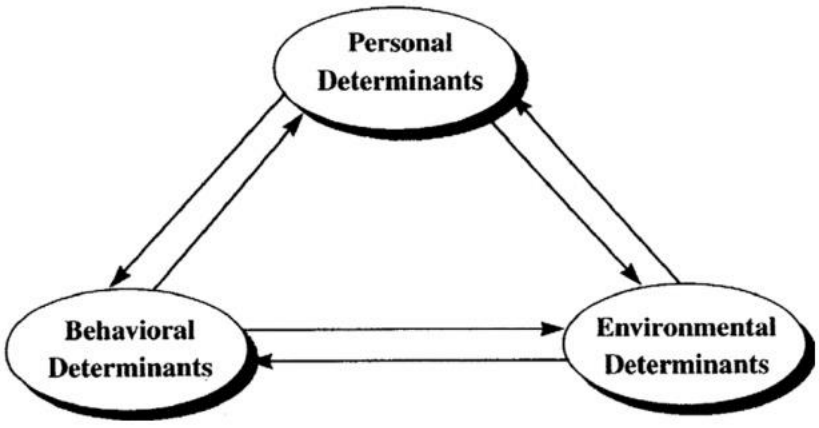
Additionally, social persuasion asserts that people are more perseverant during difficult times if they are persuaded to believe in themselves, and that resolve increases success. For this mode of influence, success is measured by self-improvement instead of triumph over others (Bandura, 2012). Finally, the fourth way of developing self-efficacy is reliance on physical and emotional states, where efficacy is strengthened by correcting misreadings of emotional and

physical states (Bandura, 2012). These sources of self-efficacy are important to acknowledge since this theory will be used to inform my understanding of teacher perceptions of confidence.

Within early childhood settings, teacher perceived self-efficacy is important because children pick up daily behaviors through vicarious learning (Bandura, 1986). Becoming aware of how children imitate those who model behavior will help those individuals become more effective models for children (Heath, 2005). Children have a natural tendency to imitate and look for models who have qualities and common characteristics similar to their own (Heath, 2005). Since children have a natural tendency to imitate and are selective in choosing models whose behaviors to emulate based on attributes, it is important to acknowledge the importance of teachers who represent cultures specific to Oklahoma. Additionally, Bandura's (2012) teacher self-efficacy will be used to inform this study to better understand teacher perceptions of confidence and preparedness to support Indigenous peoples and cultures in early childhood classrooms.

Figure 4

Schematization of Triadic Reciprocal Determination in the Causal Model of Social Cognitive Theory



Note. This figure illustrates how human functioning is influenced by intrapersonal influences, behavior, and environmental forces (Bandura, 2012).

Summary of Literature Review

The intentions of this literature review seek to reveal the literature that exists to better understand how the historical events have and continue to shape education for Native American children. While studies have been done to better understand the broader context of Indigenous cultures in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, there is limited research that focuses specifically on the curricular decision-making processes of early childhood teachers and their perceptions of confidence and preparedness to support Indigenous peoples and cultures in Osage County public schools. Not only is research urgently needed that connects to practice in ways that can be easily implemented and translated in early childhood classrooms (Faircloth, 2015), but research that acknowledges the changing and evolving needs within educational systems is crucial (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Qualitative research is needed that examines how culture is integrated and embedded in the early childhood classrooms during the critical point of child development when social perceptions are formed. Children not only need to be able to make connections to what is relevant to their world, but they need to know that what they learn supports their essential ability to thrive (Brayboy & Lomawaima, 2018). While many of the decolonizing theories discussed aim focus at the leadership level, this study seeks to better understand teacher perceptions and development at the practitioner level within the early childhood classrooms, identifying a gap in literature where Oklahoma early childhood education teacher perceptions are explored alongside teacher development and preparedness to support Indigenous peoples and cultures.

Chapter 3 will provide the outline of the methodology, research design, and procedures for this study.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will explain the methodology that will be used for this qualitative research study. I have outlined the methodological framework of case study and how this framework supports the research purpose and questions. This chapter also outlines the rigorous and ethical steps taken for this study.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to better understand the curricular decision-making processes of early childhood teachers (ECE; pre-K through third grade) when constructing learning environments related to Indigenous peoples and cultures in selected schools in Osage County, Oklahoma. Specifically, this study explored early childhood teacher unit and lesson planning, as well as perceptions related to confidence, preparedness, and effectiveness when creating learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do participants describe their curricular decision-making process as it relates to incorporating Indigenous content into their learning environments?
2. How do participants describe their professional preparation to include Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments?
3. How do participants describe their confidence while incorporating Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments?

Positioning Qualitative Research: Co-Constructing Knowledge

Qualitative research fits within the epistemology of constructionism, which assumes that knowledge is socially constructed (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014). While there is an effort in quantitative research to limit the role of personal interpretation, qualitative research, on the other hand, calls for the researcher to consider the roles of subjectivities during the research process while being aware of one's own consciousness (Stake, 1995). The defining characteristics of qualitative research include a well-developed context that is case oriented, it seeks to understand the issue rather than how it differs, it is empirical, and it is interpretive (Stake, 1995). Additionally, this rationale also calls mention to the importance of developing good research questions, which is imperative to understand the complexity and elusiveness of the phenomena and context being studied (Stake, 1995).

This study is situated in the epistemology of constructionism, where meaning is constructed by people as they interpret the world with which they are engaged (Crotty, 1998). Specifically, Crotty (1998) states,

> It is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within as essentially social context (p. 42).

In other words, meaning is constructed and not discovered, and even in the same phenomenon meaning is constructed by different people in different ways (Crotty, 1998). Within constructionism, the researcher understands that the study is a collaboration between the researcher and participants, whether or not they participate, cooperate, conceal or reveal information, or allow the researcher access (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). Constructionism

emphasizes the role of the researcher for data collection and interpretation, as the process and research product is an interaction between the researcher and outside world (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004).

The epistemology of constructionism was the best fit for this qualitative study, as I sought to understand how early childhood teachers in Osage County public schools made meaning of Indigenous peoples and cultures. Meaning making of teacher perceptions was constructed through rich data collection that was triangulated and analyzed through an iterative process with a thematic representation of vignettes, word clouds, and concept maps.

Membership Role

My membership role within the context of this study was complex, and it was important to acknowledge both the insider and outsider dynamics that influenced the research process, data collection and analysis, and data representation. Since my study was situated in Osage County, and one of the Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site schools involved in this study was located in the community where I live and was an early childhood educator for over a decade, it was important to address the notion of backyard research and to be transparent about any potential dilemmas within this research. My roles as a researcher, early childhood educator, and Osage citizen were acknowledged and recognized when approaching insider and outsider dynamics.

Backyard research is referred to as conducting research in a specific area which is part of the researcher's daily life, such as the researcher's school, neighborhood, department, church, and involving family, friends, and colleagues (Kim, 2016). Since the research topic was very specific in seeking to deeply understand curricular decision-making processes when constructing early childhood learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures, the

research sites and participants were limited and specific, particularly as it related to the Osage communities. My research endeavors were very unique to this particular area, and therefore, research was conducted locally to seek specific nuances of the Indigenous cultures within the public school, and not out of convenience for location. To explore Indigenous cultures within the local schools on land that belonged to Native peoples since time immemorial, and where Native families are still thriving today, was appropriate and supported this research study. To choose a location that was not relevant to this area would not be appropriate for the purpose of this research study, and therefore, the knowledge gained from this research was valid and legitimate, and contributed to a deeper understanding to a very specific sociocultural context.

Insider Dynamics

My family was one of the original 26 Osage families that was forced to move from Kansas to Oklahoma 150 years ago. When the federal government forced allotment on the Osage people, my great-great grandparents were forced to move onto their allotments in the area that is now Skiatook. My family is still here, with my great-great grandparents living their entire lives here, along with my great grandparents, grandparents, parents, and my sister and I all graduating from Skiatook high school, and my Osage children are students in the Skiatook school system. As an insider, I acknowledged that I possessed local knowledge from my family, as well as preexisting relationships with teachers and communities within this study. As a member of the local community and an Osage citizen, I have built professional relationships across the school district as a teacher, community member, and parent. I understood the caution surrounding research conducted at a site where the researcher and participants already have relationships established. As an insider from my experience as a teacher and administrator in Osage County, I also understood the nuances related to living and working in rural communities. My Osage

citizenship has also created the space for me seek support and insight from other Osage professionals and leaders.

Outsider Dynamics

I also recognized that I entered the research spaces with participants as an outsider. I acknowledged that while I live on the lands of my Osage ancestors, I was an outsider to some of the local communities and schools within this study. I was not an employee of the site schools or the Osage Nation, and I did not have access to the internal documents, policies, or procedures pertinent to the schools or districts, unless they were provided to me by participants.

Ethics

Before beginning my research, I obtained permission from Kansas State University Human Subjects Research Office to carry out my study. A written proposal was submitted that outlined the details of my study, which included a timeline, the research methods, the research purpose, and how confidentiality and safety were to be maintained during the course of my research (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014). My research proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board and IRB approval was obtained.

Once I received permission from the proper authorities, I followed the suggestions lined out by Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2014), which were:

1. Explain my project clearly to the participants of the study and obtain the necessary permissions.
2. Communicate with the participants about which parts of the study will be shared with them.
3. Decide what I can give back to the field site in exchange for my research time, such as a summary report of the study.

4. Identify the key documents to develop and share with the participants, such as an outline of what my research seeks to explore and why, my position and purpose of the study, and the ethical guidelines that I will be abiding by, which includes the anonymity, confidentiality, and consent form (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014).

Standards of Quality

Qualitative scholars have developed criteria for goodness that ensures that high-quality qualitative research is achieved. Traditional scientific criteria stemming from a positivist approach, such as objectivity, reliability, and generalizability, is illegitimate when it comes to qualitative work (Tracy, 2010). Therefore, standards of quality have been suggested and developed by qualitative researchers and scholars to ensure the goodness of the research's methods, practices, and ends.

Multiple standards of quality within qualitative research have been developed that are specific to the preferred methodology of the researcher. However, Tracy offers a universal model of quality that defines eight hallmarks for high quality qualitative methods across paradigms, which can be applied through a variety of paths determined by the researcher, theoretical framework, context, and project (Tracy, 2010). Within Tracy's "Big-Tent" Criteria, the criteria for quality and the various means, practices, and methods through which to achieve are clearly established. The eight hallmarks within Tracy's model include worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, and meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010).

1. Worthy topic – the research topic is relevant, timely, significant, and interesting.
2. Rich rigor – the study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex theoretical frameworks, data and time in the field, sample(s), context(s), and data collection and analysis processes.

3. Sincerity – the study is characterized by self-reflexivity about the subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s), and transparency about the methods and challenges.
4. Credibility – the research is marked by thick description, creates detail, explication of tacit (non-contextual) knowledge, and showing rather than telling, triangulation or crystallization, multivocality, and member reflections.
5. Resonance – the research influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through aesthetic, evocative representation, naturalistic generalizations, and transferable findings.
6. Significant Contribution – the research provides a significant contribution conceptually/theoretically, practically, morally, methodologically, and heuristically.
7. Ethical – the research considers procedural ethics (such as human subjects), situational and culturally specific ethics, relational ethics, and exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research).
8. Meaningful Coherence – the study achieves what it purports to be about, uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals, and meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other.

While other models of quality provided high standards of excellence for research, Tracy's "Big Tent" model was the best fit to ensure the goodness of my study. The eight hallmarks that were defined worked to ensure that my research maintains integrity, truthfulness, and is prioritized. As Tracy described, good qualitative research is like a crystal, with various facets representing the aims, needs, and desires of participants, the academy, society, public, policy makers, and the researcher (Tracy, 2010).

Conceptual Framework and Research Design

My conceptual framework was situated within the epistemology of constructionism, as this study sought to construct meaning from teacher perceptions of confidence and preparedness to make curricular decisions and create learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures. Approaching this study from the epistemology of constructionism allowed meaning to be constructed between myself and the perceptions of the early childhood teachers in Osage County. I recognized that different early childhood teachers make meaning of Indigenous peoples and cultures in different ways, and my conceptual framework outlined my approach to this study.

With the epistemology of constructionism as the foundation, the theoretical frameworks provided the structure to support the purpose of this study. The methodological framework of revelatory case study provided the tools to be able to carry out the study, and the data collection methods were intentionally chosen to collect accurate data for this study. The data analysis methods were used to understand the findings from the data and to allow the themes to emerge, which provided confluence of meaning from the data collected.

This study was informed by the theoretical frameworks of *Liberating Sovereign Potential* (RedCorn, 2020) settler innocence (Lees et al., 2021), and perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012), along with the underpinnings of community based qualitative research (Johnson, 2017) that was braided throughout the study. Since qualitative research maintains that knowledge and understanding is constructed from experiences, beginning with sensory experiences of external stimuli (Stake, 1995), these theoretical frameworks allowed me to approach this study in a way that provided structure and focus. Therefore, these frameworks prioritized Native peoples and cultures within and across educational systems, and a case study situated in the Osage

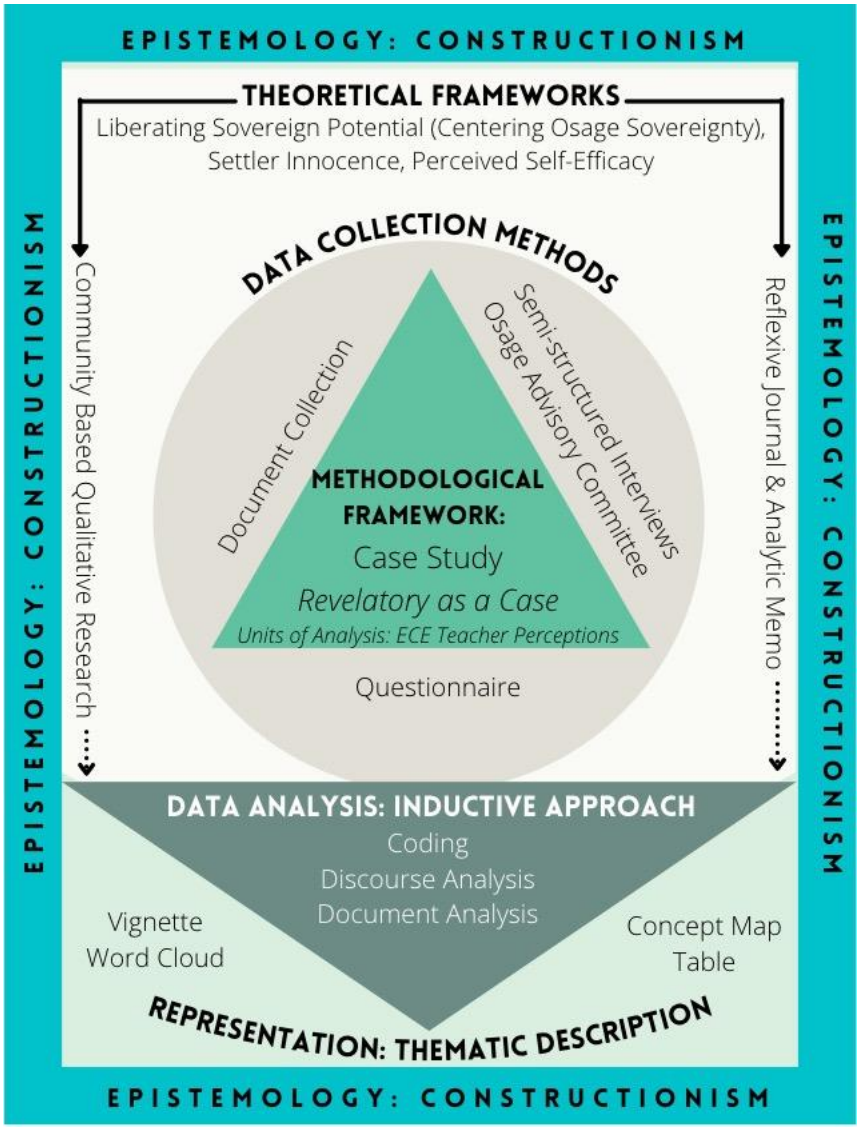
community helped me make meaning of how early learning environments are created about, for, and with Indigenous peoples and cultures.

Case study as a research method can be used in multiple situations to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of "individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena" (Yin, 2009, p. 4). For this qualitative research, case study was used to contribute to the knowledge of how Indigenous peoples and cultures are supported and represented in early childhood classrooms in Osage County. Given the significant population of American Indian students in the public schools in Osage County (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2021) and that the majority of elementary social studies state standards are focused on "Eurocentric narratives of conquest" (Shear et al., 2018, p. 12), this unique situation presented an opportunity for qualitative research. However, this situation, coupled with the recent establishment of educational priorities by the Osage Nation Constitution (Osage Nation, 2006) created an additional layer of perspective to conduct this study as a revelatory case, as this educational phenomenon was previously inaccessible to social science inquiry (Yin, 2009).

While Osage and other Native children have and continue to attend public schools in Osage County, the educational priorities recently established by the Osage Nation provided a specific opportunity to investigate teacher perceptions of confidence and preparedness to create learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures – particularly as they unfolded in the public schools. The figure below illustrates how the theoretical frameworks, methodological framework, and data collection methods, data analysis, and representation of findings were used to better understand this phenomenon specific to early childhood education in Osage County public schools.

Figure 5

Personal Visualization of Broad Conceptual Framework



Note. This figure is a concept map of my personal visualization of how this qualitative research study is organized. Each piece of the model will be discussed in detail.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks of *Liberating Sovereign Potential* (RedCorn, 2020), settler innocence (Lees et al., 2021), and perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012) were used as lenses to make meaning surrounding the early childhood teachers' perceptions of confidence, efficacy,

preparedness, and decision-making processes to incorporate and construct learning environments for, about, and with Indigenous peoples and cultures. Community based qualitative research (CBQR) was woven throughout this study to support engagement of educational systems and community partners (Johnson, 2017). Within CBQR, I used the elements of collaboration and involvement among community partners and research, while approaching research with a critical stance on issues and topics and identified ways to use findings to enact change and improve policies and programs (Johnson, 2017). CBQR was employed as an underpinning of the research process, while the theoretical frameworks of *Liberating Sovereign Potential* (RedCorn, 2020), settler innocence (Lees et al., 2021), and perceptions of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012) were used as the theoretical frameworks.

Liberating Sovereign Potential (RedCorn, 2020) positioned Native nations at the center of education capacity building while simultaneously recognizing that this model was, and should be, flexible to fit the needs of local contexts. Settler innocence (Lees et al., 2021) recognized the dominance of Eurocentrism in educational systems and curriculum, especially when it comes to white educators who not only perceive themselves as not responsible for colonizing structures in education, but who also do not have an interest in coming to know about Indigenous ideologies. Lastly, teacher perceived self-efficacy emphasized that learning occurs in a social context through reciprocal interaction between the person, their behavior, and their environment (Bandura, 2012).

These theoretical frameworks informed my methodological decisions by serving as lenses to approach data collection, specifically, when developing the closed and open-ended questions for the questionnaire, when creating interview guides and protocols, when making meaning from the semi-structured interviews with participants, and exploring the data used for document

collection. Additionally, these frameworks served as a lens for data analysis when engaging with the data and creating representations of findings.

Liberating Sovereign Potential as a Framework

Specifically, the *Liberating Sovereign Potential* as a framework framed the focus of educational sovereignty and capacity building for Native nations (RedCorn 2020) and served as a lens to understand early childhood teacher perspectives of confidence, efficacy, preparedness, and decision-making processes when working with Native children and cultures**.** RedCorn's first tenet, Assess the Educational Landscape and Identify Community Assets (RedCorn, 2020), was used to explore and identify the influences that impact teachers within the site schools. This tenet provided a way for data collection and analysis to be approached with an Osage-specific lens, which prioritized Osage Nation perspectives in an effort to better understand multiple systems of education and the ongoing learning of the professionals in these systems. While this inherently informed data collection and analysis, broadly speaking, this framework informed the larger research process, the general purpose of the project, and the larger goals associated that are relevant to the discussion of the findings and implications for practice.

Osage Advisory Committee

To help ensure that this study met the standards of quality, I invited key Osage leaders in education and cultural settings to participate in an Osage advisory committee to guide the project as it moved forward. The purpose of this advisory committee was to gather feedback about the research and interview questions that were used within this study, as well as to member check with findings after data analysis, and to gather feedback and recommendations for how the information gathered from this study can be used to support the educational goals of Osage children and the Osage Nation. As an Osage citizen, I recognized that I was not a spokesperson

for the Osage Nation and this advisory committee added a layer of member checking throughout the study. The purpose of this committee was further supported by the underpinnings of community based qualitative research, which urges researchers to connect the purpose of the study to the local resources and conditions in which they are situated (Johnson, 2017). In this case, I engaged with Osage leaders in education and cultural settings for reflection and perspectives.

While the Osage advisory committee did not have access to the raw data, they were the most influential when developing interview questions before the data collection and with feedback on the interpretation of findings. The final data representation from this study was shared and discussed with the Osage advisory committee, and they had the opportunity to advise on the final discussion section, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Settler Innocence as a Framework

Settler innocence acknowledges that white people do not perceive themselves responsible for the colonial or racist structures that are in place in educational institutions, as well as an interest in not knowing or coming to know, which maintains and perpetuates white dominance (Lees et al., 2021), This concept is typical in public school settings where settler colonialism impacts what is learned and what is not learned in the curriculum (Lees et al., 2021). While some curricular improvements have been made that address the misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples, the elementary curricula used in public schools is notorious for not addressing Indigenous sovereignty (Shear et al., 2018). Settler innocence as a framework was used to guide this study by helping to explore classroom teachers' perceptions and understanding of Indigenous cultures as it unfolded in their daily work. This understanding can help to reframe

early childhood education from a non-western approach (Lees et al., 2021). This framework provided an Indigenous-specific lens situated within educational settings that allowed for data collection and analysis that could not be provided through other frameworks. Settler innocence (Lees et al., 2021) specifically afforded me the opportunity to identify and assess the perceptions that early childhood teachers in public schools across Osage County have regarding Native cultures and children in the classroom. The ways teachers responded and communicated throughout this study show that settler innocence exists in rural-Indigenous communities, and this framework provided the lens to be able to understand the themes that emerged from the data.

Perceived Self-Efficacy as a Framework

Bandura (2012) defines perceived self-efficacy as a person's beliefs in their capability to produce a given accomplishment and is grounded in Social Cognitive Theory. This theory acknowledges that behaviors are interpreted by how well the behavior grabs one's attention, how well the behavior is remembered, the ability to reproduce the behavior, and the will or motivation to perform the behavior (Bandura, 2012). Additionally, the sources of self-efficacy are developed in four ways: mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and physical and emotional states (Bandura, 2012). Since young children learn vicariously and have a natural tendency to imitate, perceived teacher self-efficacy is important to understand in what ways teachers become more effective models for children (Heath, 2005). Further, children naturally look for models who have qualities and common characteristics similar to their own and are selective in choosing models whose behaviors to emulate based on attributes (Heath, 2005). Bandura's (2012) perceived self-efficacy framework helped guide this study by assisting exploration into perceptions of teacher confidence, efficacy, and preparedness to teach about, for, and with Indigenous peoples and cultures in early childhood classrooms in Osage County. This

framework specifically allowed me to collect and analyze data through the lens of perceived self-efficacy to identify how teachers perceive themselves through what is modeled to them from their principals and administrators, as well as how they adjust their own behaviors and decision-making processes through mastery experiences, social persuasion, and physical and emotional states (Bandura, 2012).

Methodological Framework and Design: Revelatory Case as a Single Case Study

Case study as a methodological framework is one of the most challenging of all social science undertakings (Yin, 2009). As an iterative process, it was critical to develop a case study design that fairly collected, presented, and analyzed data (Yin, 2009). Additionally, case study as a research technique focused on others' experiences through first-person accounts (Merriam, 1998). They are used to gain an in-depth understanding and meaning of a particular situation, and can be used to influence practice, inform policy and future research, evaluate programs, and are particularly useful in education (Merriam, 1998). Case studies are contextual studies that involve the close examination of people, issues, topics, and places and are unique within a specific area of content (Bhattacharya, 2017; deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). Case studies allow the researcher to look for patterns that emerge from the data, then document and interpret a set of outcomes, and try to explain how the outcomes came about (Yin, 2013), and are used to answer focused questions over a specified period of time to produce in-depth descriptions and interpretations that can be used for decision-making, discovery, and understanding (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). Clearly stated, case study as a methodological framework allowed me to gain a deeper understanding in real contexts, as opposed to providing decontextualized evidence (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014).

Since I sought to more deeply understand teacher perceptions related to Indigenous peoples and cultures after the Osage Nation's establishment of educational priorities – a phenomenon not previously accessible – a revelatory case as a single case study was an appropriate methodological framework for my research. This specific type of case study allowed me to investigate the curricular decision-making processes of early childhood teachers after educational priorities were established by the Osage Nation. The revelatory case as a single case study allowed me to focus on collecting rich data through semi-structured interviews that focused on understanding the perceptions and stories of early childhood teachers in Osage County. Additional data collection methods for this study included questionnaires and document collection, which provided dimension that other methods were not able to provide. The data were triangulated to develop a rich description of findings. Within the case study context, coding and discourse analysis were used along with reflexive journaling and analytic memoing to analyze and triangulate the data. The reflexive journaling and memoing reinforced the trustworthiness of the findings from this study.

Defining the Case

The bounds of the case, Osage County, was selected because of the significance of the Native population being served in the public schools across Osage County. There were 509 public school districts in Oklahoma (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2021) and multiple school districts serving students in communities across Osage County, Oklahoma (Osage County, 2015). There were 12 public school districts and one interlocal cooperative that are designated as Osage County school districts by the Oklahoma State Department of Education (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019). The Osage County Interlocal Cooperative was designed to provide supports and consultation for 13 school districts spanning across Osage,

Washington, Noble, and Kay Counties. This agency partnered with the school districts to provide academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional services to students in their member districts (Osage County Interlocal Cooperative, 2021), yet because of their peripheral influence in early childhood environments, they were not part of this study.

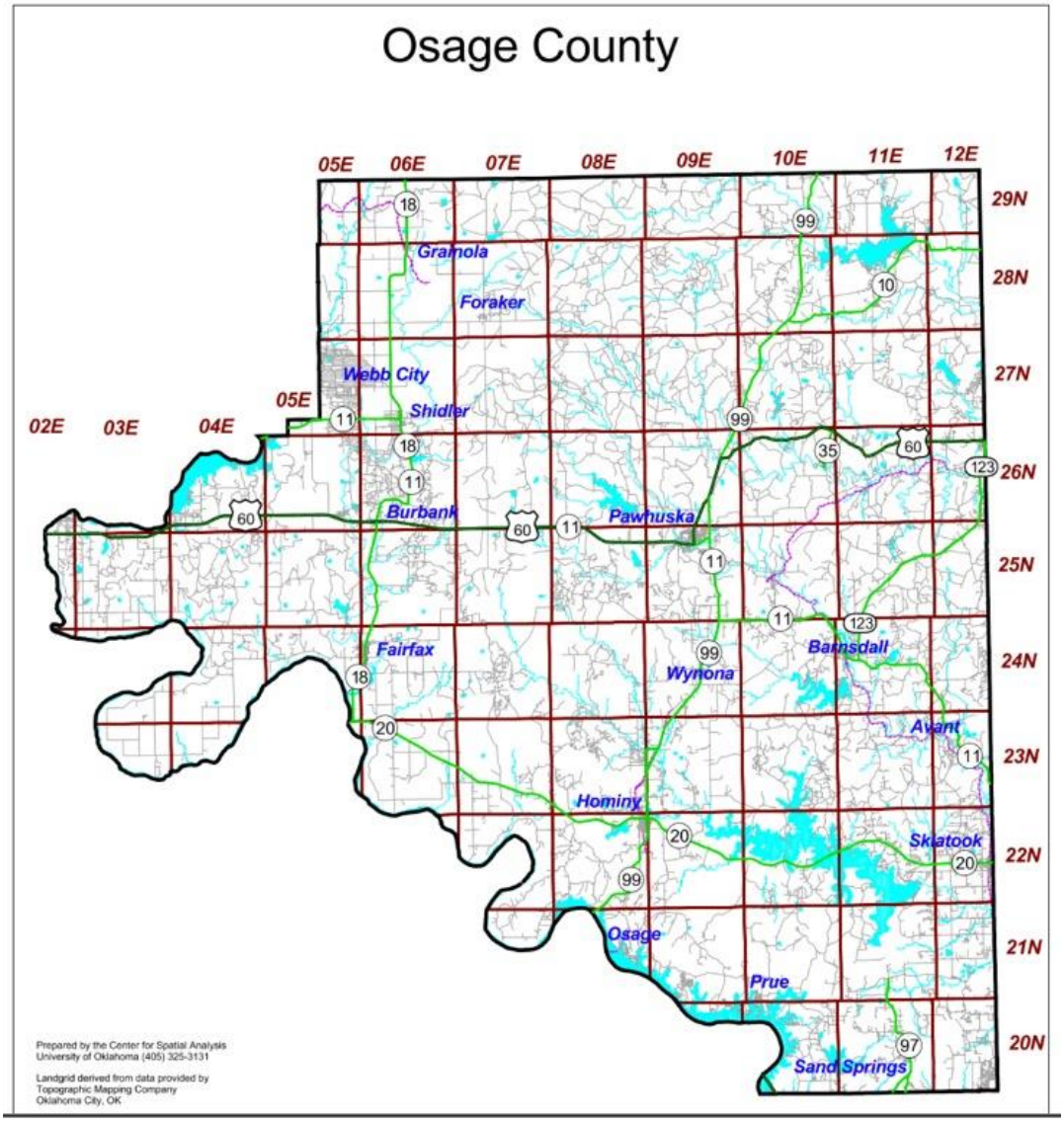
Additionally, Skiatook Public Schools was not an Osage County school district but was included in this study because of its significant population of Indigenous students and designation as an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school. On the same hand, Avant, while not an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school but an Osage County school district with a significant Indigenous student population, was included in this study, as well. Since the purpose of this study was to better understand the curricular decision-making processes of early childhood teachers and their perceptions related to confidence, efficacy, preparedness, and the decision-making processes in creating learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures, the bounds of the case were defined as Osage County.

After determining the site selection for this study, I was able to identify the teachers within the school districts who received a questionnaire by searching school district websites. I used public information found on the school districts' websites and the email list of certified staff obtained from the Oklahoma State Department of Education website to create a list of teachers identified to receive the questionnaire.

The map below provides a visualization of the physical locations of some of the communities inside Osage County (Osage County, 2015). While these communities are in Osage County, not all the school districts within the communities are designated as Osage County school districts.

Figure 6

Map of Communities in Osage County



The table below has further organized the communities and school districts by county designation, if the school district is an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school, and if the school district is included in the site selection for this study.

Table 3

School Districts in Osage County

Schools Within Osage County Boundary	Physical City of School District	School District County Designation	Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM Site School	Included in Site Selection
Anderson	Sand Springs	Osage	Yes	Yes
Avant	Avant	Osage	No	Yes
Barnsdall	Barnsdall	Osage	Yes	Yes
Bowring	Pawhuska	Osage	Yes	Yes
Caney Valley	Caney Valley	Washington	No	No
Cleveland	Cleveland	Pawnee	No	No
Dewey	Dewey	Washington	No	No
Hominy	Hominy	Osage	Yes	Yes
McCord	Ponca City	Osage	Yes	Yes
Osage Hills	Bartlesville	Osage	Yes	Yes
Pawhuska	Pawhuska	Osage	Yes	Yes
Ponca City	Ponca City	Kay	No	No
Prue	Prue	Osage	Yes	Yes
Sand Springs	Sand Springs	Tulsa	No	No
Shidler	Shidler	Osage	Yes	Yes
Skiatook	Skiatook	Tulsa	Yes	Yes
Sperry	Sperry	Tulsa	No	No
Tulsa	Tulsa	Tulsa	No	No
Woodland	Fairfax	Osage	Yes	Yes
Wynona	Wynona	Osage	Yes	Yes

Note. This table organizes the school districts in Osage County by city, school district county designation, designation of Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school, and if the school is included in this study (Osage County, 2015; Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019).

Site Selection

The research site selection were school districts that were either an Osage County school district or an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school. For this study, the sites included the 12 Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site schools and one Osage County K-8 school that is not an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school. To provide context, the city of Skiatook is unique in that the city limits are in both Osage County and Tulsa County. Osage Avenue runs north and south as the boundary line for the city of Skiatook, with Osage County west of the boundary line and Tulsa County east of the boundary line. Although all but one school building was on the Osage County side, the Skiatook School District was designated as a Tulsa County school. However, there was a significant population of Indigenous students in the Skiatook school district and the district was designated as an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school, and therefore, Skiatook was included in the data collection for this research study. Similarly, Avant was not an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school but was an Osage County school district with a Native student population and was included within this study. Skiatook and Avant met the requirements for site selection because they were either one of the 12 Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site schools or an Osage County school.

These schools were the primary location for the teacher interviews and took place via Zoom when the students were not present. Since my research sought to better understand the teachers' decision-making processes, personal stories, and perceptions of confidence and preparedness surrounding Indigenous cultures, I planned semi-structured interviews around the

convenience of the participants. The demands of teaching young children are very high and scheduling times to meet during uninterrupted instructional times during day was not a reasonable expectation, especially if teachers were responsible for multiple duties in rural schools. It is also important to acknowledge the current pandemic and the adjustments that schools had to make to meet safety guidelines by not allowing visitors inside the school. If the participants preferred to meet virtually, I coordinated with the classroom teachers to meet virtually via Zoom for interviews. It is also reasonable to acknowledge that virtual interviews were an acceptable way to interact with participants since Osage County covers 2,304 square miles, with the 13 selected Osage County schools spread across the county.

The table below organizes the schools selected for this study and provides the area of the county represented by the school district, along with the student enrollment for each district, and the number of American Indian/Alaska Native and Two or More Races (non-Hispanic) students enrolled for the 2021-2022 academic school year.

Table 4

Site Selection Location and AI/AN and Two Or More Races (non-Hispanic)

Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM Site School	**School District Community and Location in Osage County**	**District Enrollment for 2021-2022**	**Number of Reported AI/AN and Two or More Races (non-Hispanic) Enrollment 2021-2022**
Anderson	Sand Springs; rural, south central	234	76
Avant	Avant; rural, southeast	81	32
Barnsdall	Barnsdall; rural, east central	397	166
Bowring	Pawhuska; rural, northeast	59	25
Hominy	Hominy; rural, south central	552	217

McCord	Ponca City; rural, west	298	61
Osage Hills	Bartlesville; rural, east central	188	63
Pawhuska	Pawhuska; rural, central	702	413
Prue	Prue; rural, south central	282	67
Shidler	Shidler; rural, northwest	132	34
Skiatook	Skiatook; rural, southeast	2277	932
Woodland	Fairfax; rural, west	379	216
Wynona	Wynona; rural, central	109	39
Totals		**5,690**	**2,341**

Note. Enrollment numbers were found from Oklahoma State Department of Education (2022).

Since this study explored early childhood teacher unit and lesson planning, as well as perceptions related to confidence, effectiveness, and preparedness to create learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures specific to the selected public schools, the case was Osage County.

Participant Selection

When selecting participants for a case study, I selected the people who best helped to better understand the case, whether typical or not (Stake, 1995). The participants for this study were public school teachers who taught in the 13 selected Osage County schools in grades pre-kindergarten through third grade. The early childhood teachers were identified by the online directory of certified staff found on the Oklahoma State Department of Education website (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019) and cross referenced with school website searches. The preferred criteria for which the participants were selected were at least two years

of experience teaching early childhood (pre-K through third grade) in the classroom setting. Since this study was designed to better understand the ways Indigenous cultures are supported in student learning environments, and to learn about classroom teachers' decision-making process, personal stories, and perceptions of confidence, effectiveness, and preparedness, it was reasonable to select teachers who have had the opportunity to develop, or begin developing, their individual professional identities and classroom design. The teachers were contacted by email solicitation to participate in this study and were also able to agree to be contacted for an interview by clicking an external link on the questionnaire to provide contact information.

As a researcher native to and living in Osage County, a citizen of the Osage Nation, and my background experience teaching in the Skiatook Public School district, I did not want my role as a researcher to be blurred with friend or former colleague, or in any way influence the responses that the participants shared with me during this study. The underpinnings of community based qualitative research guided how I approached participant selection as a qualitative researcher to make sure teachers are valued and respected, not positioning myself as "beneath" the participants (Johnson, 2017). I acknowledged that I was a quasi-insider attempting to put distance between myself and the participants. I worked to be transparent about my subjectivities by using researcher journaling and analytic memos. It is also worth acknowledging that the relationships that were built within the teaching community allowed the conversations to go deeper with teachers who I have interacted with prior to this study than those who I did not share a history with.

Units of Analysis

The units of analysis were the perceptions of teachers who taught early childhood pre-kindergarten through third grade ranging among the 13 selected Osage County schools. The

teachers were identified by the public data base of certified staff from the Oklahoma Date Department of Education website (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019) and cross-referenced with school website searches. These perceptions were understood through semi-structured interviews, which provided depth and rich data collection from first-person experiences and stories from public school teachers across Osage County. The interviews provided a way to travel deeper into the social worlds of teachers to understand their perceptions. Further, the questionnaire provided a unique dimension to data collection by being able to gather authentic teacher perceptions, unattached from identity and consequences. The questionnaire provided a space for teacher perceptions to be gathered in a way that was not collected during interviews. The document collection was also another facet that helped to make meaning of teacher perceptions by gaining insight into what and how their perceptions were influenced. These early childhood teacher perceptions were gathered across the school districts identified during site selection.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods that were used for this qualitative study were semi-structured interviews, questionnaire, and document collection. These methods of data collection allowed me to gather teacher perceptions through specific sources that provided dimension to the depth of the case that could not be found through other sources. The data collected through these data collection methods were triangulated to create a rich description and representation of findings. I maintained organized files, spreadsheets, and notes to keep track of my data collection.

The table below outlines the data collection methods used for this study, along with strengths, participants, duration, timeframe of data collection, how the data was collected, and the analysis used during this study.

Table 5

Organization of Data Collection Methods

	Questionnaire	Semi-structured Interviews	Document Collection
Strengths	Adaptive, convenient, cost effective; can triangulate with other sources (Briggs, Coleman, & Morrison, 2012)	Focused directly on case study topics, insightful (Yin, 2009)	Stable, unobtrusive, exact, broad coverage (Yin, 2009)
Participant(s)	ECE teachers (pre-K-3rd) teaching in the 13 site schools; 44 respondents, with 30 usable questionnaires	11 ECE teachers teaching in the 13 site schools Osage Advisory Committee (5 Osage leaders in education and cultural settings)	Online and physical documents, pictures, lesson plans, agendas, curriculum maps, school handbooks, policies, college degree sheets
Duration	5-10 minutes for respondent to complete	(1) 60-minute interview per participant	Ongoing throughout study
Timeframe	May-July 2022	May-September 2022	Ongoing throughout study
Collection	Email; Qualtrics	Virtual via Zoom or phone interview	Documents provided from teachers; public documents collected from online sources
Analysis	Discourse Analysis; First and Second Cycle Coding; Reflexive Journal; Analytic Memos	Discourse Analysis; First and Second Cycle Coding; Reflexive Journal; Analytic Memos	Document Analysis; Discourse Analysis; First and Second Cycle Coding; Reflexive Journal; Analytic Memos

Note. This table shows the organization of data collection methods, including the purpose and strength that each source provides, as well as an overview of the timeframe and coding methods used to triangulate the data.

Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire for this study was not interested in large-scale work requiring statistical decision-making (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014), it was uniquely

concentrated on smaller groupings in order to access the views and attitudes of the teachers, and to collect demographic data that could be helpful to understand background, context, and any trends or patterns with the schools or communities (Johnson, 2017). This data collection method was chosen since case studies provide rich and in-depth pictures through different types of data collection such as "interviews, observations, questionnaires, video, audio taping, web-based discussion and different viewpoints" (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014, p. 20).

The questionnaire was intentionally designed to include a mixture of closed and open questions that sought to gather a combination of factual information, broad overview of and attitudes towards the topic, and provided the flexibility to allow respondents to enter their own responses (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014). Since it is not uncommon to use a survey for all respondents and then select a few for the case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1979), this questionnaire was designed to gather perspectives from early childhood teachers, then allow them to choose if they would like to be contacted for an individual interview. The questionnaire gathered more than surface-level yes or no answers, it used research question-based questions that worked to gather a description of an explanation, linkage, or episode (Stake, 1995), along with some basic descriptive statistics. The questionnaire was formulated to evoke authentic responses that allowed respondents to share anecdotal references to their unique experience or story (Stake, 1995), and the participation was voluntary by the teachers. To ensure that responses were completely voluntary, the questionnaire questions were not required to be answered by the participants. Since residents of small towns tend to know each other, the issue of anonymity was taken into consideration when designing the questionnaire. If teachers thought the data or results could be traced back to them or reflect poorly on themselves or their school, giving teachers the anonymity to answer was an important aspect to consider. Further, if the questions were required

to be answered, then it would take away from the participant's ability to voluntarily participate in the study.

Specifically, the questionnaire was designed through Qualtrics with a combination of 30 closed and open questions. The questions were developed to better understand the educators and their perceptions of confidence, effectiveness, and preparedness to support Indigenous cultures in public school classrooms. The descriptive data collected from the teachers included the number of years taught, grades/levels currently teaching, level of education completed, college or university where their teacher education was obtained, perception or level of understanding of Indigenous culture, perception or level in which college/university prepared them to teach in Osage County, and any affiliation/enrollment with Native Nation(s). Open questions were intentionally designed to gather narratives about teacher perceptions of confidence, effectiveness, and preparedness to support Indigenous cultures, barriers or limitations perceived by the teachers, and resources needed to help or support teachers to be able to support Indigenous cultures in public school classrooms. An informed consent was embedded in the introductory section of the questionnaire and included a link at the end of the questionnaire to a secondary form to gather participant contact information if they agreed to be contacted for an individual interview.

Once the questionnaire was complete, it was tested for content validity. A draft was reviewed by the Osage Advisory Committee to gather feedback of questions, and revisions were made. The questionnaire was then sent to a pilot group, which included an Osage Advisory Committee member's department staff and 3 public school teachers in Osage County. The pilot group provided feedback on suggested edits to improve the questionnaire, and revisions and minor technical fine tunings were made before sending the questionnaire to the identified

teachers. The finalized questionnaire consisted of 30 questions that contained 17 questions that were closed, and 13 questions designed to gather narrative responses.

The teachers identified to receive the questionnaire were identified from the Online District List provided on the Oklahoma State Department of Education website (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019) and cross referenced with the school district websites to remove or add teacher email addresses. Using both sources of emails was valuable since some information from school district websites were not updated or did not have emails associated with teachers' names. Some school district websites were designed in such a way that once a teacher's name was clicked, form fields were generated to input a question or message, but no formal email appeared to be accessible from the website. Still, other emails from the Oklahoma State Department of Education had incorrect domains or misspellings, as discovered for Woodland Public Schools. All emails sent to Woodland teachers were rejected because the online directory from the state listed teacher domains as Fairfax. These adjustments were made as they arose, and questionnaires were resent to teachers whose emails were rejected.

From the list obtained through the Oklahoma State Department of Education, the teacher names were filtered by county, school district, and state licensure codes. Since early childhood licensure and elementary licensure both include first through third grades, the questionnaire was sent to teachers from each licensure code. This allowed the questionnaire to encompass all teachers who have or currently teach pre-K through third grade. The questionnaire was scheduled to be sent three times over the duration of one month.

Because of the rural context within this study, questionnaire as a data collection method provided a specific dimension to data collection that the other methods were not able to provide. Specifically, because of the design, the questionnaire reached the greatest number of teachers

within the bounds of this case, and non-identifying questions about the teacher or school district allowed teachers to answer authentically and anonymously. As advised by Pierce and Scherra (2004), researchers must be cognizant of the unique complications that arise when collecting data in rural settings. The impact of location of appropriate participants and ethical considerations were intentionally addressed to protect the integrity of the data (Pierce & Scherra, 2004). Since the schools in this study are rural with most districts having less than 10 teachers assigned to pre-K through third grade, asking respondents which district they teach in would not be appropriate since the type of response could likely be connected back to a certain teacher or school district, thus compromising the anonymity of the data. This was taken into consideration because partnerships with the school districts and the Osage Nation could potentially be damaged or harmed if teachers or schools were negatively identified. The professionalism and ethical integrity that I needed to maintain with teachers and the Osage Nation was done so in hopes to support the ongoing, developing, or future partnerships between both the school and Osage Nation. The questionnaire provided teachers from all site schools a space to share their unique perceptions without the potential risk of consequence or identifying themselves or their school.

Questionnaire as a data collection method was a specific tool used to gather teacher perceptions of confidence, effectiveness, and preparedness to support Indigenous peoples and cultures in a way that the other sources were unable to do. Data from the questionnaire were triangulated with data from the other data collection methods to find confluence of meaning. Descriptive information, closed questions, and open-ended questions were arranged in a spreadsheet that allowed for comparison and analysis. A combination of in vivo, values, descriptive, and pattern coding were applied to the qualitative data in multiple cycles (Saldaña,

2016). Tools for discourse analysis were also used to understand what teachers were communicating through this data collection method (Gee, 2014).

All teachers within the bounds of the case who had early childhood education and elementary licensure codes were identified to receive the questionnaire. In efforts to gather teacher perspectives and responses from all teachers in grades first through third, the questionnaire was sent to teachers with the licensures to teach grades pre-K through eighth grade, with the questionnaire filtering out elementary education teachers who were not currently teaching or had experience teaching grades pre-K through third. From the 243 teachers identified to receive the questionnaire, a more realistic number of teachers in grades pre-K through third were identified by searching school websites to determine the number of teacher positions in grades pre-K through third. The population size for the questionnaires was 116 teacher positions, with an ideal sample size of 43 teachers, based on 90% confidence level and +/-10 margin of error. The table below organizes the teachers identified for the questionnaire, and findings will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Table 6

Organization of Teachers Identified for Questionnaire

School District	District Grade Levels	All ECE and Elementary Teachers Identified by Licensure Code	Pre-K-3 Teacher Positions Identified by School Websites
Avant	pre-K through eighth grade	4	3
Anderson	pre-K through seventh grade	17	6
Barnsdall	pre-K through 12th grade	16	8
Bowring	pre-K through eighth grade	10	3
Woodland	pre-K through 12th grade	18	9

Hominy	pre-K through 12th grade	17	8
McCord	pre-K through sixth grade	19	9
Osage Hills	pre-K through eighth grade	15	5
Pawhuska	pre-K through 12th grade	31	13
Prue	pre-K through 12th grade	15	5
Shidler	pre-K through 12th grade	8	5
Skiatook	pre-K through 12th grade	62	38
Wynona	pre-K through 12th grade	11	4
Total Teachers		**243**	**116**

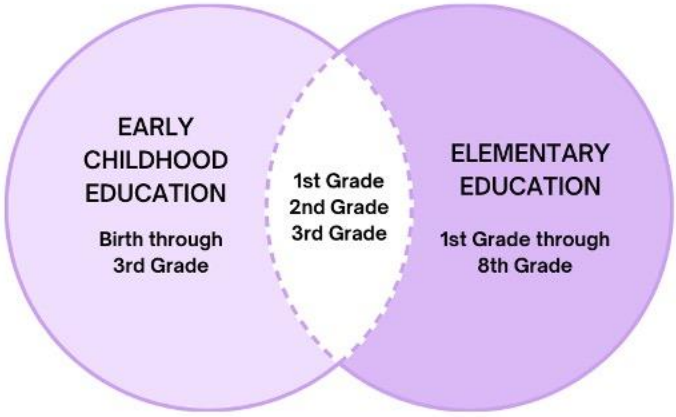
Note. The Wynona school district website was not current, so this number was estimated based on grade levels and number of teachers employed at that school.

It is important to acknowledge that early childhood and elementary education licensures are both certified to teach grades first through third in Oklahoma. The diagram below shows the visual overlap of grades taught by both early childhood education teachers and elementary education teachers, and why both licensure codes were included in the teachers identified to receive the questionnaire. Early childhood education teachers focus on early learning and development in children from birth through third grade, and elementary education teachers focus on academic education for children in grades first through eighth.

The diagram below illustrates the overlap of grade levels that can be taught by both early childhood certified teachers and elementary certified teachers in Oklahoma. The questionnaire was sent to teachers with both licensure codes in order to reach all teachers teaching pre-K through third grade from the schools within the bounds of this case.

Figure 7

Overlap of Grade Levels Taught by Early Childhood and Elementary Licensures



Semi-structured Interviews

Qualitative research affords the researcher the opportunity to uncover and represent multiple views within a case, and interviews are the pathway to multiple realities (Stake, 1995). For this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect teacher perceptions and narratives of their lived experiences teaching in public schools in Osage County. Semi-structured interviews allowed for the conversation to naturally flow to gain rich understanding, and interviews were conducted with 11 early childhood teachers having experience teaching in the 13 site schools. Again, it is important to recognize the rural context that exists within this study to develop realistic expectations for the number of participants (Pierce & Scherra, 2004) and research questions that are intentionally designed to gather the type of data necessary for this study. The interview questions were carefully designed to explore the depth of teachers' social contexts at school and to capture glimpses into their worlds through meaningful and intentional conversations. Semi-structured interviews as a data collection method provided the tool for teachers to express their perceptions within their unique professional realms.

Since this study was designed to specifically understand the public school teachers' perceptions of themselves when incorporating Native cultural content, the existence of Osage knowledges and ways of being that are part of these rural communities were respected and acknowledged throughout data collection. Specifically, when approaching semi-structured interviews as a data collection method, it was imperative to consider the language and terminology used for the interview questions as well as during conversations with teachers. Knowing that the school districts of Pawhuska, Hominy, and Woodland are located in communities that are also the Osage tribal districts or villages, the term "district," was used carefully and with purposeful intention. For participants across all schools in this case study, "district" could mean school district, or it could mean one of the three Osage villages. The Osage districts are Pawhuska, Hominy, and Grayhorse, and are distinct cultural communities that are representative of the Osage citizens whose families belong to each district. The word "district" in reference to an Osage district or an Osage County school district are not synonymous terms and could impact the outcome of the data collected. Knowing this cultural contextual nuance within these rural communities, research questions were specifically developed to solicit the correct knowledges and perceptions from the participants.

The teachers solicited for the semi-structured interview were emailed using the list obtained through the Oklahoma State Department of Education that was filtered by county, school district, and state licensure codes, and cross-referenced with school district websites. The teachers were provided the information regarding this case study and asked if they would be willing to participate in a semi-structured interview or focus group. This allowed the opportunity to include teachers who may have chosen not to participate in the questionnaire or wanted to provide more in-depth discussion to this research topic. The semi-structured interviews allowed

for rich discussions with teachers and to get glimpses into their personal experiences and daily lives at school in a way that the other data collection methods could not uncover. The questions were purposefully developed to evoke genuine dialogues with the teachers and were different than the questions asked on the questionnaire. The conversations with the teachers provided clarity and insight into real personal experiences, social contexts in public schools across Osage County, and school cultures and climates that impact their decision-making processes and perceptions of confidence and effectiveness to support Native cultures. The duration of each interview was approximately one hour, and transcriptions were completed immediately after. The nature of the semi-structed interviews allowed the conversations to naturally evolve based on the content of the discussions, and an interview guide was used to keep the conversation on topic with the research questions.

I was prepared to take detailed notes and document the details of the interview as soon as the interviews were concluded in the event that a participant chose not to be recorded. As a Native American, I understand that it is not uncommon for Indigenous participants to request not to be recorded. Additionally, interviews were not conducted during times when students were present. This study was designed to understand teacher perceptions, and including children was not suitable for this study. Interviews with teachers were conducted at the convenience of the teachers, and keeping in mind the rural context, Zoom meetings were found to be the most reasonable platform for efficiency of scheduling, time, flexibility and use of financial resources. All participants' identifying information, including school district, remained confidential for this study in order to respect and maintain the integrity of the partnerships with the schools and Native nations. Pseudonyms were used in place of teachers' names, and any identifying

information related to the teachers have been altered to respect the trust, partnerships, and identity of the teachers and the schools.

Document Collection

Data collection by gathering documents followed the same thought process as interviewing or observing (Stake, 1995). For this study, I used lesson plans, curriculum maps, websites, policies, JOM meeting agendas, news articles, policies, school handbooks, and early childhood and elementary education degree sheets from institutions of higher education to gather rich data. This data collection method allowed me to not only collect data to gain deeper understanding of teacher perceptions, but it was also intentionally chosen as a way to make sense of the influences on teachers at the macro-level, meso-level, and micro-level. Specifically, each document collected was like an open window into the teachers' daily lives. Each piece of data provided a snapshot of reality by what was being communicated, or not communicated, to and by teachers. Document collection as a data collection method specifically paved a pathway that allowed me to look into the public schools in a way that would not be available to me by other data collection methods.

Moreover, document collection as a data collection method was intentionally chosen for its capability to uncover the realities that shaped teacher perceptions and decision-making processes. This method also accommodated the rural context by being able to provide contextualization about the language, actions, and communication from each site school. Since it was not realistic to expect that I would have been able to attend meetings or observe certain situations with students present, document collection provided an alternative pathway to gain understanding when I would have not been able to otherwise. It is common for documents to serve as a substitute of events that could not be directly observed by the researcher (Stake, 1995).

For this reason, document collection served as a very useful data collection method. The documents collected from this method are catalogued to show how they are connected to this research study.

The textual data was analyzed using first and second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016) and document analysis (Bowen, 2009), along with the tools for discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) to understand the influences that impact early childhood teachers from this study. The documents collected helped to further understand what is, or is not, communicated to teachers when it came to Indigenous cultures in early learning environments. A table connecting the purpose and potential benefits of the documents collected has been organized below.

Table 7

Organization of Document Collection

Document Collection	**Purpose for Collection and Analysis**	**Potential Benefits from Findings (CBQR-Based)**
Lesson plans, curriculum maps/ guides, school calendars	Analyzed for insight into lessons/activities decision-making at the classroom level; identify connections to Indigenous cultures; identify potential professional development/trainings for teachers	Impact authentic collaboration; engage administrators and Native family members and elders
JOM agendas, meeting minutes, reports of events	Analyzed to better understand curricular decision-making or teacher collaborations; identify connections to Indigenous cultures; identify resources, parent and community perceptions	Impact professional development, conferences, interactive workshops, round tables; engage variety of target audiences and community leaders, members, and Native leaders/elders
School websites, social media sites, school events calendars, and communication	Analyzed to understand the messaging and positionality of the district/schools toward Indigenous cultures/families; analyzed potential resources, programming, funding, aide/grants related to Indigenous cultures	Impact community perspectives, accomplishments; engage variety of audiences and Native nations

Administrative documents, reports, policies, handbooks	Analyzed for district/school culture, attitudes, and policies related to Indigenous cultures	Impact local and national policy, reports, publications, presentations, Native partnerships
News clippings, articles in mass media or community news, local and state policies (HB-1775, HB-2957)	Analyzed for relevancy and connections to impacts on teacher decision-making processes	Impact academic audience, publications, journals, relationship building with community voices and perspectives
Institutions of higher education websites, early childhood education degree sheets, elementary education degree sheets	Analyzed to see if colleges or universities appear to be incorporating Indigenous histories or contexts into early childhood teacher preparation programs	Impact early childhood programs, engage in conversations or partnerships at the college level; impact early childhood pedagogy for teaching in Native rural communities

Note. This table outlines the types of documents collected and analyzed during the study, as well as potential ways the findings can support Native partnerships with the school using a community based qualitative research approach. The documents collected provided snapshots into the professional spaces that teachers lived and experienced in their schools and communities.

Osage Advisory Committee

Since this study centered on Osage Nation sovereignty and educational goals, I returned to the Osage Advisory Committee to report the findings that emerged from this study. The purpose of returning to the Osage Advisory Committee after the data analysis was to gather their thoughts and perspectives on the findings, and to add a layer of context and confirmation to the findings. The Osage leaders in education and cultural settings within this committee provided a specific cultural understanding and insight that could not have been provided from other data collection methods. It is important to acknowledge the significant layer of Indigeneity that the Osage Advisory Committee added to relevancy of this study. These leaders confirmed hunches that I had as an Osage researcher but could not find in literature. For example, my own intuition

told me that some teachers who participated in the questionnaire but chose not to be contacted for a personal interview could have likely opted out of an interview out of fear of being researched, or to protect their cultures.

The Osage leaders in education and cultural settings within this committee also provided contextual insight into the JOM programming across Osage County schools that I could not have understood through research alone. For example, mandatory consultations between the Osage Nation and the public schools were discussed and how those interactions look, take place, and in what ways the meetings are received by the schools. Additionally, the committee provided recommendations for what should be done with the information moving forward to improve the education for Osage students in public schools. These recommendations for future research opportunities will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Data Management

The data collected and analyzed throughout this study were dealt with carefully and explicitly, with an ongoing consideration for security and confidentiality of the data (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014). I interacted with my research and participants with trust and respect and took the necessary steps to ensure that validity and dependability of the data management and analysis were maximized. The data were stored on my personal, private computer that did not have public access. Physical documents and data were stored in a locked file cabinet in my office.

NVivo Software

I used NVivo software to assist in the analysis of the qualitative data, which helped manage data, mange ideas, query data, visualize data, and generate reports from the data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). I understood that the software could support a more rigorous

analysis, and that computer software cannot turn "sloppy work into sound interpretations, nor compensate for limited interpretive capacity by the researcher" (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, p. 3). Further, I followed the suggestions from Saldaña (2009) and strived to attain the seven personal attributes that qualitative researchers: be organized, exercise perseverance, be able to deal with ambiguity, exercise flexibility, be creative, be rigorously ethical, and have an extensive vocabulary (p. 28-30). Therefore, my approach to data management and analysis was preplanned and organized so I could stay close to the data and provide a representation that could accurately show and not tell the findings from this study.

Based on the frameworks informing this study and the background information that was already known going into the data analysis process, provisional codes were established. The provisional codes were used as tentative labels during the initial review were:

1. Barriers and Limitations to Teach American Indian Lessons
2. Culture in School
3. Current Materials and Resources
4. Influence of Mandated Testing
5. Influence of Osage Nation in Community
6. Osage Nation Website and Lessons
7. Oklahoma State Department of Education Website
8. Perceptions of Teacher Effectiveness in Teaching American Indian Lessons
9. Perceptions of Teacher Confidence in Creating Learning Environments That Reflect American Indian Cultures
10. Student and Family Resources
11. Teacher Experiences

12. Training and Professional Development

13. University and College Preparation

14. What Could Help Teachers

After multiple cycles of coding, discourse analysis, and document analysis, the codes were rearranged, changed, combined, and even eliminated to reflect the themes that emerged during analysis. The provisional codes served as a starting place to organize the amount of data collected from questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document collection.

Reflexive Journal and Analytic Memos

I used a reflexive journal to record my thoughts, hunches, reactions, beliefs, and assumptions to analyze how they influenced the data collection and analysis (Bhattacharya, 2017). Similarly, Saldaña (2009) suggested writing analytic memos about specific participants, theories, perplexities, or even the loss for a specific code, the discovery of better codes, and categories that may emerge. A reflexive journal allowed me to record and document my thoughts throughout the research process.

Since this qualitative study was designed to better understand a very specific phenomenon of early childhood teachers' perceptions of confidence, effectiveness, and preparedness in decision-making when creating learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures, I recorded many hunches, reactions, and perplexities throughout this study. I also used my journal to make notes about notions that I wanted to explore further, as well a place to keep my thoughts organized and clear during the study. My reflexive journal and analytic memos were helpful throughout this study, especially during the coding process as themes began to emerge. Reflexive journaling served as a tool to maintain credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability throughout my research (Guba &

Lincoln, 1989), and acted as an additional data analysis process by providing a record of coding and writing that was used for auditing and triangulation of my data.

Data Analysis

I used coding combined with discourse analysis as a method to analyze the data collected for this qualitative study, along with reflexive journaling, analytic memos, and document analysis to assist in the triangulation of data to allow themes to emerge.

First and Second Cycle Coding

Coding was used to classify interviews, documents, and episodes in order to make the data retrievable at different points in time (Stake, 1995) Additionally, the use of coding and member checking supported and reinforced trustworthiness of my research (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014). After the first cycle of coding methods, I member checked before engaging in the second cycle of coding methods to confirm validity, transparency, and accuracy of the data collected (Saldaña, 2009). Additional rounds of coding and other analysis techniques were determined based on what was found in the first round of coding.

As the first round of coding began, the exploratory method of provisional coding was used, which allowed for the development of preliminary assignments of codes and the use of tentative labels during the initial review (Saldaña, 2016). A more specific first round of coding was then conducted which focused on the relevance of each provisional code, resulting in more defined categories and the provisional codes to be developed and modified. As the data was analyzed through additional rounds of more defined coding cycles, the affective method of values coding and descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2016) were used. These methods of coding allowed for deeper exploration of data that represented the participants' views and perspectives,

specifically as it related to their belief systems, cultural values, experiences, and identity (Saldaña, 2016).

Pattern coding was used as a second cycle coding method that pulled all the data collected from this study to create more meaningful units and themes (Saldaña, 2016). As the semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and documents were coded, patterns began to emerge from what the data showed. From these patterns, additional rounds of coding took place until categories and themes were uncovered. Throughout the coding process, the theoretical frameworks of *Liberating Sovereign Potential* (RedCorn, 2020), settler innocence (Lees et al., 2021), and perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012) were kept in mind. These frameworks positioned Native nations at the center for educational sovereignty and assessing the landscape and identifying assets.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis was also used as a method for analyzing the data collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document collection. As a method for analysis, it was done across multiple sources, both verbal and written, and it did not require the researcher to be a linguistic analyst to identify the underlying and overarching societal themes (Briggs et al., 2012). Discourse analysis became particularly appropriate when analyzing responses, which "allows the researcher to look beyond what is being said and written" (Briggs et al., 2012, p. 317). The theoretical frameworks for this study were also kept in mind and created the opportunity for discourse analysis as a method of analysis to address the "complexity of movement across educational sites, practices, and systems in a world where inequalities are global in scope" (Rogers, 2011, p. 1). Discourse analysis acknowledged the emergence of systems of meaning in cultural, racial, social, political, economic, and religious contexts, and

were connected to socially defined practices that carried value and privilege in society (Rogers, 2011).

While there are many different approaches within discourse analysis, the main approach used for this study was to concentrate on the ideas, themes, and issues that were articulated through talk and writing. Since social, cultural, and academic expectations exist in education, discourse analysis tools helped to make meaning of the visual images, as well as spoken and written language used by classroom teachers. The early learning environments specific to Osage County schools and communities created a unique social setting that combined language, social interactions, social relations, and the structure and use of the physical space (Rogers, 2011), allowing discourse analysis as a method for analysis to help make sense of teacher perceptions related to how they created culturally responsive learning environments.

This case study was specifically situated in Osage County to better understand settler innocence in Osage County public schools, which also provided the unique opportunity to inform educational decision-making that will ultimately impact Indigenous students. Therefore, it was appropriate for this case study to employ discourse analysis as an analysis tool to shed light on the positionalities, identities, and subjectivities of the participants and the analyst as a shared sense of responsibility (Stevens, 2011). Gee's tools for discourse analysis were used to analyze the data collected, which are tools for language and context, saying, doing, and designing, building things in the world, and theoretical tools (Gee, 2014). For this study, I choose the tools that were the best fit to analyze the data, focusing on figured worlds as the specific tool of inquiry (Rogers, 2011).

Moreover, Fairclough (2011), a leader in critical discourse analysis, asserts that teaching and learning, both of which are social practices, are facilitated and interacted through orders of

discourse comprised of ways of interacting, ways of representing, and ways of being. Because the concept of figured worlds refers to the narratives and images that are used by different cultural and social groups to make sense of the world (Rogers, 2011), this method of analysis helped to make meaning of teacher perceptions in their professional worlds. Using this tool, the participants, activities, language forms, environments, institutions, and values were analyzed by asking, "What typical stories or figured worlds the words and phrases of the communication are assuming and inviting listeners to assume" (Gee, 2014)? This tool was used to uncover the themes that emerged from the triangulation of data.

A deeper understanding of the data collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document collection, was gained by using Gee's tools for analysis in the areas of language and context, saying, doing, and designing, building things in the world, and theoretical tools (Gee, 2014). Discourse analysis was used to uncover power and systems of power that existed in the classroom and educational systems as it related to settler innocence in Osage County public schools.

Document Analysis

Document analysis was used during this study which allowed the researcher to examine data through printed and electronic material, and to interpret and evaluate the data in order to obtain meaning and understanding (Bowen, 2009). Bowen lays out five specific functions of documentary material, which include:

1. Documents can provide data on the context within which research participants operate.
2. Information contained in documents can suggest some questions that need to be asked and situations that need to be observed as part of the research.
3. Documents provide supplementary research data.

4. Documents provide a means of tracking change and development.
5. Documents can be analyzed as a way of verifying findings or corroborate evidence from other sources (Bowen, 2009, p. 30).

For this study, document analysis was used in combination with analyzing and coding questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document collection, allowing for triangulation of the data to seek confluence of meaning. Document analysis had both advantages and disadvantages in qualitative research (Bowen, 2009). The disadvantages that posed potential imitations were that the documents available provided insufficient detail, had low retrievability, and were biased in selectivity (Bowen, 2009). I realized that several of the documents did not provide abundant detail, and access to some documents were not available to non-district employees, limiting access to internal documents that could have provided further insight for this study. However, the advantages for this method were that the documents were available, cost-effective, stable, exact, and lacked obtrusiveness (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis was useful to offer contextual and deep understanding of the research topic for my qualitative research (Bhattacharya, 2017), and included a wide range of data through printed and electronic materials. Since this case study was situated in Osage County, document analysis allowed meaning to be made about teacher perceptions of efficacy, confidence, and preparedness by collecting and examining data from schools and teachers across a large geographical area.

Representation of Findings

The case study report followed Stake's (1995) critique checklist to create a thematic description to represent the way meaning was co-constructed with the participants. I used detailed descriptions to make sure the data "shows, not tells," and I let the data to do the talking so the reader could make meaning of the representation without "telling" the reader what to think

about the data (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 160). Rich descriptions were provided to give the reader a sense of being there, or a vicarious experience (Stake, 1995). Similarly, Merriam (1998) asserts that one of the major points to keep in mind with case studies is that descriptions should be rich in order for the reader to vicariously feel as if they were there. Knowing that the readers of this case study representation were also likely participants, it was imperative that I show the data, not tell, and present the data with its contradictions and complexities (Bhattacharya, 2017). For these reasons, I used rich, vivid, descriptive writing that provided a vicarious experience for the reader.

I used Stake's (1995) method of incorporating vignettes, or episodes, into the description as a way for readers to connect to the study. Vignettes illustrate an issue within the case and are often atypical representations (Stake, 1995). Since readers of this study were likely to be early childhood educators, both Native and non-Native, it was important for connections to be made to better understand the importance of this research topic, especially for short-term and long-term effects. I also used tables, word clouds, and concept maps in the representation of findings. It was important that the representation of findings was approached with intentionality to respect the integrity and trust that has been established between teachers, school districts, community partners, and tribal partnerships, particularly in rural, Native communities.

Development of Case Regarding Current Political Environment

It is important to note that the political climate regarding critical race theory in school has been a major topic in Oklahoma since legislature passed House Bill 1775 and was signed by Governor Stitt House in 2021 (OSSBA, 2022). This topic rose to the forefront of attention again when the state Board of Education approved permanent rules regarding Oklahoma's HB-1775 on March 10, 2022, prohibiting certain concepts to be taught to students, included in curriculum or materials, included in professional development, or be part of the schools' plans for diversity,

equity and inclusion (OSSBA, 2022). HB-1775 also created uncertainty regarding the consequences and progressive discipline against teachers who violate the emergency rules.

Since August 2022, two Oklahoma school districts have been downgraded in their accreditation status for violating the anti-critical race theory law in Oklahoma (Pendharkar, 2022). Tulsa Public Schools, which is located just outside Osage County and is the largest school district in Oklahoma, was downgraded to "accredited with warning," which means that the violation of HB-1775 was found to seriously detract from the quality of the education provided to the students (Pendharkar, 2022). In this particular case, a classroom teacher reported feeling shamed as a white person during a professional development that addressed teachers' implicit bias. Similarly, Mustang Public Schools, located near Oklahoma City, was also found to be in violation of HB-1775. In this case, the school's accreditation status was also downgraded to "accredited with warning" after students reported feeling uncomfortable after playing a game facilitated by a teacher that was meant to help students recognize differences (Pendharkar, 2022).

The recent rules approved by legislation were in effect less than two months before the data collection process began for this study. The uncertainty of the rules and implications from the recent passing of HB-1775 was taken into consideration for this study. Hesitancy or refusal by public school teachers to participate in this study because of critical race theory and consequences for violating HB-1775 should be taken into consideration, as this topic headlined in local Oklahoma news during the time of this study (Slanchik, 2022; Keitt, 2022; Ibarra, 2022).

Consideration of Rurality in Relation to Partnerships

While the overall context of rurality was taken into consideration in regard to data analysis, it is appropriate to acknowledge the rural context in relation to the partnerships and capacity building across Osage County. Because of the small number of early childhood teachers

in the schools across Osage County, careful consideration was taken regarding the way communication with teachers was handled, the number of solicitations for participation in the study, and the way the purpose of this study was presented to teachers. Additionally, it was important to consider that exhausting teachers with this study had the potential to leave a negative impression about the Osage Nation, Indigenous cultures, or myself as community member and researcher with the potential to interact with these teachers again in the future. Consideration was taken into account about the way this study was approached to make a positive impression that could support current or future Native partnerships with the public schools. Consideration was also given to avoid any potentially damaging or harmful effects on current or future partnerships. Because of the rurality and these relationships, it was important not to be a burden to the participants of the study, as cautioned through community based qualitative research (Johnson, 2017). If overburdened, I risked creating a negative image toward or about the Osage Nation or Indigenous cultures. Any negative impressions could jeopardize current or future partnerships between the public schools and Native partners.

Summary of Methodology

This chapter provided a clear outline of the conceptual framework used for this research study. The frameworks of *Liberating Sovereign Potential* (RedCorn, 2020), settler innocence (Lees et al., 2021) and perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012) provided the lenses to approach this study. Further, by using case study, specifically a revelatory case as a single case study, I was able to gain deep understanding of the curricular decision-making and teacher perceptions of preparedness, confidence, and efficacy when constructing learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures in early childhood classrooms in Osage County. Further,

the consideration of recent political developments in Oklahoma and the context of rurality surrounding this case study was discussed.

Chapter 4 will provide the analytic details of the study and a detailed summary of the findings, and Chapter 5 will be comprised of the interpretation of the results, connections to literature, connections to the theoretical and methodological frameworks, significance of the study, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 4 - Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

This study allowed for deep exploration of the Osage-specific nuances in teacher decision-making within curriculum and learning environments in an area where there is a significant population of Osage and other Native American students and teachers, of which few social scientists have taken the opportunity to investigate. This chapter provides a thematic description of the findings. The findings show, not tell, and will be connected to each data collection method and research questions, followed by the themes that emerged through triangulation of data and analysis.

Descriptive Data from Questionnaires and Semi-Structured Interviews

The data collection methods were intentionally chosen to gather the correct type of data to understand early childhood teachers' decision-making processes and their perceptions of confidence, preparedness, and efficacy to support Native children and cultures in public school. The questionnaire was sent to 243 teachers with early childhood and elementary education licensures out of consideration for the overlap in grade levels and teachers who may not be listed on school website directories or accurately recorded on the Oklahoma State Department of Education online list. The number of teaching positions in pre-K through third grade based on school websites across the school sites was 116. Since I could not accurately distinguish the elementary education teachers who only taught first through third grade but have licensure to teach first through eighth grade, I relied on the questionnaire to filter out teachers who did not meet the grade level requirements for this study. Knowing this, the initial 243 questionnaires sent was necessary to include in order to capture potential responses from the overlap of teacher licensures but was not considered the population size. The more realistic population size for the

questionnaire was the 116 teacher positions for pre-K through third grade identified from the site school websites. Therefore, the population size for the questionnaire was 116, with an ideal sample size of 43 teachers. The ideal sample size was the proportion of the teachers I hoped would respond to the questionnaire to be representative of this specific target of teachers, with parameters set for 90% confidence level and +/-10% margin of error.

There were 44 responses collected from the questionnaires with 30 usable questionnaires. The 14 unusable questionnaires appeared to be started but not completed and did not provide enough data to be calculated into the questionnaire findings. The 30 usable questionnaires were included in overall findings, and it is acknowledged that the questionnaire generated interest from public school teachers. The 30 usable questionnaires generated a response rate of 26%. A standard agreed upon response rate for qualitative questionnaires was not identified, but a study conducted by the Penn State Technical Assistance Team (2019) found that average response rates for external surveys range from 10% to 15% (Penn State, 2019). The non-response rate for this questionnaire does not necessarily mean that the remaining percentage of teachers chose not to participate in the questionnaire. Possible reasons for non-responses could have been impacted by schools' firewall, or screening processes, that filter out or divert emails and other information sent to school district email accounts that could be malicious, harmful, or sent from unidentified sources. Other reasons for non-responses could have been the timing of the study, lack of trust from the teachers that the questionnaire was anonymous, apprehension to participate in a study that appears to be about Native Americans, and lack of time for rural teachers to complete the questionnaire if they have multiple duties, positions, and roles within the school district. The response rate for the questionnaire used within this study was appropriate and attempting to increase the frequency for this qualitative research in rural communities would not necessarily

lead to more information, especially since the focus on qualitative research is on meaning and not generalized hypothesis (Ritchie et al., 2003; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

From the semi-structured interviews, 11 teachers from different schools across the county provided a specific layer of contextual knowledge through their lens and personal perceptions of lived experiences working within the site schools and living in the Native communities. The teachers participating the semi-structured interviews were pre-K, kindergarten, first grade, and second grade teachers, with more pre-K and second grade teachers than kindergarten and first grade teachers. This differed from questionnaire demographics, which had the most teachers participating in grades kindergarten and first grade. Data also show that 18% of teachers participating in the semi-structured interviews were Native American, while 43% of questionnaire participants were Native American.

The table below provides the demographics of the teachers who participated in this study. While some early childhood teachers in some Osage County schools chose not to respond to solicitation for participation, teachers were from schools that spanned the county and were not dominant to one location within the county. The demographics from the data collected are organized to provide context to the findings from this study.

Table 8

Participant Demographics

	Questionnaire	**Semi-Structured Interview**	**Osage Advisory Committee**
Participants	44 respondents; 30 usable questionnaires	11 rural teachers	5 Osage Leaders
Experience	3-year-old, pre-K, kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade, transitional grades	pre-K, kindergarten, first grade, second grade	Osage leaders in education and cultural settings

Native American Participants	13	2	5
Region of Osage County	Osage County	Portions of Osage County (Central, Northern, Southeastern, Western, Southwestern, Eastern)	Osage Tribal Administrative Offices
Mean Professional Experience	13.5 years	11 years	11.5 years
Range of Professional Experience	1-29 years	4-25 years	4-19 years
Pseudonym	Anonymous	Anne, Bree, Elle	None

Note. Findings from three teachers who participated in the semi-structured interview will be shared through a descriptive vignette. These vignettes provide a description of what was observed by the researcher during the interview and provides a glimpse into the experiences of the teachers' reality teaching in public schools in rural, Native communities.

Osage Advisory Committee

The Osage Advisory Committee acted as a layer of member checking and confirmation of findings. The Osage leaders within this committee were presented with findings from this study, and they provided valuable comments and input that supported the themes that emerged from the data. The Osage Advisory Committee also provided a unique Osage-centered contextual layer of member checking and confirmation by looking at the findings through the lens of educational sovereignty for Native children. The committee provided the opportunity to for this study to understand contextual details about the findings that may have been missing or misinterpreted during data analysis. The Osage Advisory Committee also confirmed the themes

that emerged from this study, while offering suggestions about how this study can be used to further the education of Osage and all children, along with future research opportunities.

Connection of Findings to Research Questions

A rich description of findings connected to the research questions will be provided, followed by four themes that stretch across all research questions. Through this thematic description, direct quotes from teachers who participated in the semi-structured interviews and teachers who shared narrative responses on the questionnaire will be provided and will remain anonymous. Additionally, in vivo codes from teachers are used to create poetic vignettes of settler innocence throughout the representation of findings. The poetic vignettes of in vivo codes allow the voices of the early childhood teachers to resonate through the findings.

My pulse quickened ever so slightly as I introduced myself to "Elle." After corresponding through emails and conversing back and forth trying to coordinate a convenient time to meet, I felt like I was finally meeting a celebrity. She was organized, confident, and shared so much about her students that by the time our nearly two-hour meeting was over, I felt like I knew them myself. Her passion for teaching didn't have to be explained; I could feel it by the way she described her near-hour drive to school every day, and the preparation she took ahead of time to create learning centers and independent literacy games for her children so she could create time to meet with them one-on-one to work on sight words, phonics, and comprehension skills. Pride beamed from her smile as she shared the number of students on reading plans going from more than half her class down to only one by the end of the year. She worked tirelessly each day to make sure everything was just-so in her classroom, taking whatever work was left over at the end of the day home with her to finish, like grading, planning lessons, and cutting out laminated

flashcards. Her dedication to her students was nothing short of inspiring, and I felt a sense of security knowing that she let me record our conversation. Trying to scribble into my research journal everything she does in a day to make sure her children are academically prepared would have been no easy task. As she paused to take a sip of water she curiously said, "I don't know how I am going to help you; I'm white."

Research Question 1: How do participants describe their curricular decision-making process as it relates to incorporating Indigenous content into their learning environments?

Triangulation of data provided confluence of meaning to understand the decision-making processes of early childhood teachers when incorporating Indigenous cultural content within their learning environments. The values communicated by internal and external stakeholders influenced teachers' curricular decision-making processes, and as these processes were analyzed, teachers were found to naturally adjust their decisions to reflect the prioritized values that were modeled to them from institutions of higher education, the Osage Nation, and their principals and administrators. These decisions to incorporate Indigenous cultural content were further found to fall into two types of decisions. These categories were: 1) decisions that have an effect on the teacher, and 2) decisions that were safe for the teacher, which resulted in teachers choosing – or not choosing – to incorporate Native cultural content.

Values from Institutions of Higher Education and Native Nations as Macro-Level of Influence

With higher education courses and programs as teachers' first professional influence, the institutions of higher education that teachers attended were found to influence how early childhood teachers made decisions to incorporate Indigenous cultural content in the classroom. The preparation of academic rigor that was taught through the required coursework and

programs at colleges and universities created a firm foundation about how to teach academic skills to children but did not specifically focus on Indigenous concepts. Teachers expressed uncertainty about how to specifically incorporate Native cultural content, which was articulated through feelings of uneasiness about misinterpreting Native cultures, and discomforting feelings of not having enough knowledge as a teacher to support Native cultures. Teachers were also vocal about their concerns of inaccurately teaching about, or misrepresenting Native cultures and peoples, and they expressed their fear of unintentionally being disrespectful to Native students and families.

When teachers were hesitant to make curricular decisions that they were unsure of, they relied on what was comfortable, familiar, and safe from their education pedagogy and skills learned from colleges and universities. Teachers indicated that they were equipped with an understanding of how to navigate curricula and understood how to make decisions that were aligned to academic standards. When trying to better understand the thought processes that teachers experience as they work through what or how to incorporate Native cultural content, one teacher with years of experience teaching multiple grade levels in early childhood education shared her experience. She described recognizing a shift from concepts that used to be taught and having to learn things on her own,

> The reason why we have Columbus Day is that people have celebrated the fact that he discovered "America," but we all know that he didn't discover anything. This land was already here and there were people living here in this land…I think it's something that I've recognized on my own; I have not seen this in my classroom curriculum at all (personal communication, May 25, 2022).

Questionnaire responses show that 86% of those responding to the questionnaire had never taken higher education courses specific to Native American histories or cultures. Yet, they also indicated that higher education was found to impact teacher decision-making processes academically, but it was less influential on their decisions to incorporate Native cultural content. As this early childhood teacher from the other side of the county shared,

> There's not like there's a unit about it, or even a day. There are various stories in our book, and they involve various cultures, but it's nothing particular to that local culture…I think you could find modern stuff, but our curriculum is provided for us (personal communication, June 10, 2022).

Findings indicate that even when teachers recognized that Native cultures exist in schools, they tended to adjust their decisions-making processes to align to the ways they were prepared by higher education to teach academic standards and use instruction from curricula.

An additional influence at the macro-level that uniquely impacted teacher decision-making processes for early childhood teachers were the values communicated from Native nations. Specifically, the influence from the Osage Nation was found to be communicated to teachers through both cultural and financial values. The cultural values from the Osage Nation were communicated directly to teachers through the Osage partnerships with the schools. The way those partnerships were established, maintained, and visible within the school influenced the decision-making process for teachers. One early childhood teacher respectfully and excitedly explained a specific cultural experience that took place at her school after being asked how she makes decisions to support Native cultures:

> That was one of my favorite parts…they would have a [cultural] dance and invite everybody, Native and non-Native to dance together, and they would serve the meal. Our

> cafeteria would partner with them and send food. We would have corn soup with hot dogs; it was just a mix of what the school offered together with what the Native tradition would be. And in the classroom, we have an Osage language person…It was exciting; I'm not Osage (personal communication, May 25, 2022).

Other teacher responses included acknowledgement of tribal influence within the communities, including, "I am striving for authenticity and respect of the local cultures at all times" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022).

The financial values reflected from the Osage Nation to teachers communicated academic support for teachers by providing and purchasing non-cultural resources like school supplies or sponsoring professional development not related to Native cultures. Those efforts portrayed the Osage Nation as a financial resource in rural communities, but not necessarily as an influence at the curricular decision-making level for teachers. One teacher enthusiastically shared during an interview, "There was a whole table of supplies. I mean Sharpie markers, paper, and sticky notes" (personal communication, June 10, 2022), while another teacher in a different part of the county who had just as much energy as her own children giggling and playing in her classroom after school, lost the sparkle in her eye as she shrugged, "I haven't been told they are a resource, other than school supplies" (personal communication, September 9, 2022).

Triangulation of data show that early childhood teachers who worked in schools that had an active and visible partnership with the Osage Nation, JOM committee, or had access to Native cultural resources, were influenced to make decisions that supported and incorporated Native cultural content into learning environments. Conversely, teachers who worked in schools that did not have an active partnership with the Osage Nation, had low or no visibility of JOM committees, or did not have access to Native cultural resources, were less influenced by the

Osage Nation to make decisions that supported and incorporated Native cultural content into learning environments. As detailed by teachers through questionnaire narratives, “The lack of presence of the Osage Nation in my community has set the tone for our entire school district,” and “Beyond helping to offer tutoring and other financial and supply supports, I am not aware of any lessons for my age level” (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022).

Teacher responses on the questionnaire revealed deeper insight into what is being communicated to teachers from the macro-level of influence regarding Native cultures and education. When teachers were asked if they were aware of the Native American lessons on the Oklahoma State Department of Education website, 86% of questionnaire respondents said no. Of the teachers who said they were aware of the lessons, they also reported that they have not used them because they are not early childhood friendly options and need to be more developmentally appropriate, hands-on, and interactive. Other responses showed that they were only aware of them because of graduate programs. Similarly, when asked if teachers were aware of the Osage lessons on the Osage Nation website, 83% of teachers said no. Of the teachers who were aware of the lessons, all reported that they have only heard of them but have never used them.

Values from Principals and Administrators as Meso-Level of Influence

A considerable amount of contextual knowledge was uncovered about the systems in place within the schools that impacted teachers. The prioritized values of principals and administrators were found to strongly influence the teachers’ decision-making processes. The way prioritized values from educational leaders were communicated to teachers impacted how teachers considered their choices to incorporate Native cultural content. Nearly all teachers’ perceptions of academic priority were found to be valued by principals and administrators, and these values were communicated to the teachers in spoken and written ways. Early childhood

teachers expressed a sense of urgency to focus on academics to prepare their students for academic success beyond early childhood. As teachers shared that they mostly focus on math and literacy skills, the importance of prioritized academic values that is communicated within school systems echoed from what that teachers were saying.

Document collection confirmed the prioritized academic value that teachers were communicating from their responses. Parent and student handbooks, district websites, and school policies from across site schools were collected and analyzed, and academic priorities were found to be clearly communicated. These documents also included procedures to make sure students achieve academic goals by stating the roles and responsibilities of the schools and teachers to carry this out, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the parents and students as investors in their own education. Some school handbooks outlined how student incentives and extracurricular activities were contingent upon student academic performance. Additionally, daily schedules, curriculum guides, lesson plans, and content provided during professional development described by teachers reiterated the priority for teachers to focus on academics.

Document collection further indicated priority of academic achievement in secondary schools, outlining student academic requirements for participation in sports and extracurricular activities, field trips, and academic programs and clubs. Along with these documents found on district websites, the Teacher Leadership Evaluation (TLE) link was also embedded under employee resources on most school district websites. During document analysis, a text search for the presence of the Osage Nation within these documents did not produce any results. Questionnaire responses such as, “I focus on reading and math, not culture” (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022), correlated with teachers expressing their feelings of pressure to focus on academic priorities communicated from their school district leaders. These prioritized

academic values were perceived as what teachers must consider, not ones they may consider when making curricular decisions. Further, an undertone of effects was found to be connected to teachers' decision-making processes when decisions deviated from school expectations.

Effects-Based Decisions Influencing Early Childhood Teachers

When teachers made decisions to incorporate Native cultural content into learning environments, consideration for outcomes were found to impact decisions. These outcomes, or effects, were perceived as being either consequential or beneficial for the teacher. Consequential effects were perceived by teachers when incorporating Indigenous cultural content did not align with the values reflected by principals and administrators and had some sort of effect on the teacher. Beneficial effects were perceived by teachers when incorporating Indigenous cultural content aligned with the values reflected by their principals and administrators. These teachers described how supporting Native cultures made sense to their students, and how it is incorporated into their daily schedules at school.

The consequential effects were identified when the teachers viewed the Osage Nation as an outsider and perceived Osage language teachers and tutors as separate from the schools. Teachers who were not able to articulate what the Osage language teachers or tutors specifically provide to the students tended to be more frustrated with the partnership, and undertones of hinderance on the teachers' daily schedules were observed. These teachers shared that when their students were pulled out of class by Osage Nation teachers or tutors, they had to work around these pullouts to make up for lost instructional time, so their students did not fall behind academically. Other effects that were indicated by teachers were defined as monetary bonuses being withheld, loss of teacher incentives based on student achievement scores, not meeting curricular performance expectations, poor performance on teacher evaluations and observations,

and fear of discipline. These consequential effects impacted teachers' decisions to incorporate Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments, and decisions were primarily adjusted to the values from their principals and administrators.

The beneficial effects were identified when the teachers observed the Osage Nation valued by their principals and administrators. As one early childhood teacher cheerfully shared, "They [Osage Nation teachers] taught so many traditions of respect and they tied all that into what we were learning about…It just made sense to me, and I wanted to be part of that" (personal communication, May 25, 2022). Teachers who teach at schools where the partnership with the Osage Nation is valued by principals and administrators influenced their decision-making processes, and the effects were beneficial. The teachers who were more likely to make curricular decisions that reflected Native cultural content in their learning environments also reported having access to cultural materials and resources. The beneficial effects that emerged from the data were teachers receiving support from Osage language teachers and tutors, access to cultural resources and supplies, Native children being more comfortable and confident at school when their cultures were reflected, and all children making connections between Indigenous cultures in the learning environment and what they see in their own community. One teacher shared her experience teaching in a school where the Osage culture and partnership were valued:

> A lot of our Osage families are so involved in the learning of the kids, they really are. They are on top of things, making sure those kids are taken care of…Our school has always been good about getting us what we need; if we need the resources, they are going to find a way to get them for us (personal communication, August 8, 2022).

Beneficial outcomes were identified as personal satisfaction to be able to provide Native cultural content that develops respect of Native American cultures for all students.

Safety-Based Decisions Influencing Early Childhood Teachers

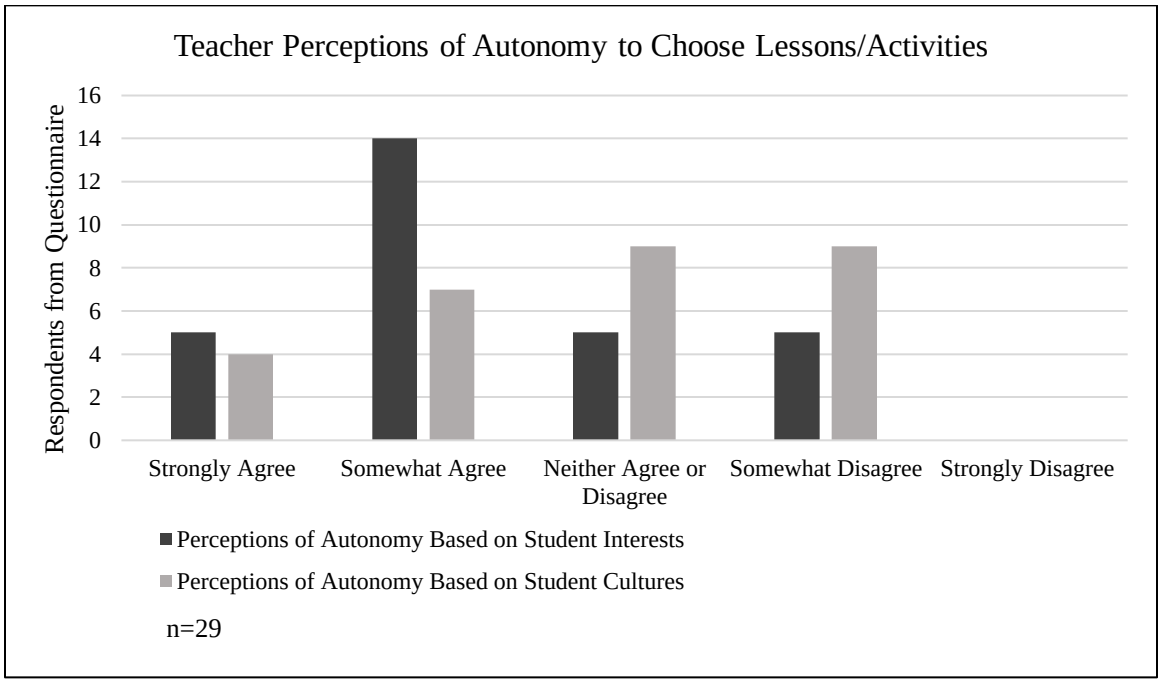
A major component to the decision-making processes that teachers considered was the concept of making decisions that were considered safe. These safety-based decisions were identified as teacher autonomy to make decisions in their own classrooms based on student interests and student cultures, and the safety of creating an inclusive learning environment that embraces all cultures. Teacher autonomy was found to influence the decision-making processes for teachers to incorporate Native cultural content in learning environments, if the decisions were viewed as being safe or having no perceived consequences associated to teachers' decisions. Teacher autonomy to make decisions based on student interests and student cultures were influenced by the safety of utilizing curriculum that pre-populated Native cultural content.

The table below shows the perceptions of teachers who responded to the questionnaire regarding their autonomy to choose lessons and activities based on student interests, and their perceptions of autonomy to choose lessons based on student cultures. The teachers rated their personal perceptions from these statements: "I have the autonomy/power to choose my own lessons/activities based on my students' interests," and, "I have the power/autonomy to choose my own lessons/activities based on my students' cultures." Of the teachers who responded, perceptions of autonomy to choose lessons or activities based on student interests were mostly agreeable, while perceptions of autonomy to choose lessons or activities based on student cultures trended toward less agreeable. The internal struggle to make decisions to incorporate Native cultural content is demonstrated by this response, "It seems as though teachers struggle to know how to respectfully incorporate Native American lessons and activities" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022). Triangulation of data show that these teacher perceptions were consistent with the perceptions of teachers who participated in semi-structured interviews, as

well as documents collected that communicated prioritized values to teachers from their principals and administrators.

Table 9

Teacher Perceptions of Autonomy to Choose Lessons and Activities



When teachers were asked to describe their decision-making processes, the value of autonomy to choose and adapt lessons based on student interests was found to have worth for teachers. One teacher shared, “I’m such a visual, hands-on teacher that I want my kids to be able to manipulate and do things. It makes it stick with the kids more than just showing them, you know” (personal communication, September 9, 2022), show that teachers have the autonomy to add elements of creativity and discovery in early childhood learning environments. Document collection generated pictures of educational field trips, guest speakers at school, and teachers providing hands-on sensory experiences for children to expand academically. Within the learning environments, teachers called attention to their learning centers, classroom design, and activities that supported early learning and development. The autonomy to make decisions based on

student interests further extended into teacher willingness to purchase classroom resources and materials themselves through Teachers Pay Teachers, Google, and Pinterest. Nearly all of the teachers participating in semi-structured interview shared that if they want to add additional activities, they have to search for it themselves. Teachers who valued the autonomy to adapt to student interests were able to connect their decisions to the required curricular expectations, perceiving their decisions as safe and likely having no adverse consequences.

Data further show that teachers who made decisions based on student interests were more willing to do so if the decisions were aligned with their classroom curriculum, supported state standards, or had a direct benefit that would support student assessments and testing. School policies and parent handbooks showed breakdowns of academic mastery required for grade promotion and retention in early childhood, along with expectations for mastery in skills specific to math, reading, language arts, and fluency skills. Questionnaire responses like, "Achievement on these [tests] is our main goal" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022), were common responses and confirms expectations of teachers to support academic priorities. When student interests are connected to academic priorities, teacher autonomy to adjust decisions to align with student interests was perceived as safe for teachers.

When it came perceptions of autonomy to make decisions on lessons and activities based on student cultures, findings show that teachers did not feel as independent to make curricular adjustments as they did with student interests. The values from principals and administrators impacted teachers' perceptions of themselves to make choices based on Native cultures, as one teacher reported, "It is discouraged to discuss specific cultures and beliefs" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022). Findings show that Native cultures were not intentionally pointed out or incorporated into learning environments, and teachers lacked the appropriate supports and

resources to specifically teach about Native American cultures. Documents collected from schools confirmed these perceptions through complaint process policies for racial discrimination in curriculum, corrective action plans for students in violation of racial discrimination, school racial discrimination policies, and Title VI coordinator contact information for parents to file racial complaints. Further, school websites that embedded the direct link to the Oklahoma State Department of Education provided the pathway for teachers, parents, and community stakeholders to access additional policies, including the newly passed HB-1775 regarding critical race theory in school. Making these resources available to teachers on their own school district websites, along with what principals and administrators communicated to teachers, set the attitude for what is valued at their schools. For these teachers, having the autonomy to choose not to make decisions based on student cultures was perceived as safe.

On the other hand, when teachers were able to connect Native cultural experiences to lessons and curriculum, their autonomy to adjust lessons and activities based on student cultures was more positive. Although teachers recognized the presence of Native American cultures in their communities and Native students having strong identities within their culture, data show that teachers were more likely to value autonomy when they can connect student cultures to classroom literature and learning standards. This response came from an energetic, cheerful, early childhood teacher who shared her experience,

> In the last couple of years, I have more kids that don't get Native American culture; they don't know…I think that's the cool part about our science and social studies time. If I wanted to teach a specific thing during that time, I could find a way to teach it…I know being a Native American, being in the Nation, I think it is super important for our kids to know even just a little bit. Even if they're not Native American, I think it's important. I

mean, we live in a reservation part of the state (personal communication, September 9, 2022).

Particularly, teachers who described autonomy to make decisions specific to Native cultures were able to incorporate culture into their lessons in meaningful ways and connect Osage content to academic purpose. A noteworthy comment was made by a teacher whose school actively engaged with the Osage teachers and tutors. As she reflected about how she interpreted lessons from her school's curriculum, she commented, "In the curriculum they have the Columbus and Native American [theme] and I thought that was really outdated. I am just torn now whether you teach that or not" (personal communication, May 25, 2022). Her perplexity weighed heavy in her expression and the inflection in her voice made her statement sound more like a question. This comment suggested that teachers who engaged with Osage Nation teachers and tutors and had access to cultural resources and information were more likely to recognize inaccurate representations of Native cultures when it comes up in their curriculum.

Teachers who taught in schools with active partnerships also described incorporating Osage language into their academics throughout the day, including during their morning meetings with students, learning about colors, numbers and counting, playing classroom games, and displaying Osage orthography around the classroom. The Osage values of respect and taking care of each other were identified as specific Native cultural content that teachers autonomously chose to incorporate into their learning environments. Teacher autonomy to make decisions based on student cultures was more prevalent when Native cultures and partnerships were communicated to teachers as being valued by their principals and administrators. Data show that when principals and administrators communicated respect for and toward Native cultures, teachers were more likely to connect cultural relevancy to academics for all children.

When teachers were not able to connect Native content to purpose or relevancy, limitations to incorporate Native cultural content emerged from the data. Teacher responses expressed a disconnect between cultures and relevancy in the classroom, which impacted how teachers make curricular choices about students' cultures. Questionnaire responses like, "It's not really relevant to the subjects I teach" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022), were common responses to explain why certain levels of autonomy were chosen on the questionnaire. Other limitations were identified as lack of cultural resources, lack of support to learn about how to teach Native cultures, limited time to teach Native cultures, lack of knowledge about Native American cultures, and lack of understanding to be able to make decisions based on Native cultures. For these teachers, the decision-making process to support Native cultural content remained neutral and safe as teachers avoided disrupting the processes that are already in place or did not know how to deviate from the resources provided by the school.

Safety of Inclusion for All Cultures Influencing Early Childhood Teachers

Data show that the concept of inclusion was one of the most influential safety-based decisions shaping teachers' decision-making processes. Diversity was found to be an overarching term used by teachers to encompass all cultures, minorities, and disabilities. Teachers communicated the concept of diversity as a general idea that does not clearly define Native American cultures. Although teachers described the importance of helping children recognize diversity in learning environments, documents collected referred to inclusion in school as being more consistent with special services, special education programs, and acceptable use policies, even inclusion for all students to engage in internet and electronic digital communication. As teachers strived to create inclusive learning environments that supported the concept of diversity, Native American cultures were found to be normalized with all other cultures, minorities, and

disabilities. Data show that inclusion made up a large portion of the decision-making processes for teachers, and in the effort to recognize diversity, inclusion was a safe way to support all students in their classrooms without drawing attention to any certain culture. Responses like, "We are inclusive of all cultures inasmuch as those appearing in our language arts resources" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022), illustrate the safety of inclusion.

Data show that inclusive classrooms demonstrated to students that everyone is different on the outside but the same on the inside, or that everyone is the same regardless of what is on the outside. As one teacher reported, "We do not purposely create learning environments that reflect Native American cultures" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022), indicating that inclusion safely creates learning environments that do not distinguish one culture over another. Creating inclusive environments toward all cultures produced a sense of safety regarding the teachers' decision-making processes. Without specific Indigenous cultural supports and resources, in addition to limited knowledge specific to Native cultures, the concept of inclusion was perceived by teachers as one of the most applicable and safe ways to approach diversity.

Poetic Vignette of Settler Innocence Woven Throughout Decision-Making Processes

We are under a lot of pressure to teach to the state standards.

I would be afraid to misrepresent them…

They never told me I have to.

I do not know enough…

We're all the same.

We talk about how everybody is different.

What if I say 'Indian…'

The Osage Nation does not come to my school in a visible way.

I don't feel comfortable teaching Native American theory to people who are Native…

I would love to have more of their culture, but how do you do that?

Research Question 1 Summary

The data show that teachers' decision-making processes were influenced by the prioritized values that were communicated to them from internal and external influences. Teachers were found to adjust their decision-making processes to reflect the values that were communicated to them as having worth. The decision-making processes were analyzed to reveal that teachers made decisions to incorporate Native cultural content into their learning environments based on perceptions that their decisions were effects-based or safety-based. At the macro-level, institutions of higher education and Native nations impacted the classroom teachers in different ways, and findings show that the prioritized values from principals and administrators at the meso-level were the most influential toward the decision-making processes to incorporate Indigenous content into early childhood learning environments at the micro-level.

I absorbed every word as "Bree" described her classroom. Color words, number words, all posted around the room with the corresponding Osage orthography to match. I could not help but share her enthusiasm as she explained her plans to work with their Osage language teacher to integrate the Osage orthography into literacy games going in her learning centers next year. Bree cheerfully described how all the children learn about Osage culture every single day; "It takes no time at all!" Being able to ask questions and get resources directly from the Osage language teachers was so easy, as she confidently and matter-of-factly chuckled, "I just ask them; it's a huge resource to have at our school."

Research Question 2: How do participants describe their professional preparation to include Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments?

Teachers described their perceptions of preparedness to support Indigenous cultural content into learning environments, impacting their beliefs about themselves as being effective and accountable to their schools and students. Understanding teachers' perceptions of effectiveness concentrated on how strongly teachers believed in their ability to incorporate Native cultural content into learning environments from their professional preparation within their professional educational communities.

Professional preparation influenced teachers' perceptions of their ability and professional accountability to their school and students. When it came to teaching about, for, and with Native cultures and peoples specifically, teachers largely associated their professional preparedness to the current trainings and professional development opportunities provided to them in their teaching positions. Teachers were less likely to relate preparedness to pedagogical values from institutions of higher education, and more likely to associate preparedness in relation to their current contexts. While higher education was not absent from the findings, data show that teachers' perceptions of preparedness were more connected and influenced by the ways their current professional development and resources supported them to be prepared to carry out daily tasks and meet professional expectations at school.

The priorities that were directly communicated by principals and administrators that influenced teachers' perceptions of effectiveness were the priorities of time, utilization of resources provided by the school, and alignment to lessons and activities to the professional development and training provided by the schools. Data also show that teachers' perceptions of preparedness influenced the ways they approached incorporating Indigenous cultural content.

The more teachers felt prepared professionally, the more effective they perceived themselves to support Native children.

Accountability to Time and Resources Provided by the School

Professional preparation was also viewed by teachers as what was provided for them by their schools as professionals to be effective teachers for their students. Teachers focused on the more urgent, everyday resources and professional development to feel prepared to incorporate Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments. The more prepared teachers were from professional development and trainings specific to Native cultures, along with having access to cultural resources and materials, the more effective they perceived themselves as professionals and able to incorporate Native cultural content. Further, findings show that teachers' perceptions of effectiveness were largely connected to their beliefs that they were accountable for managing instructional time competently, especially when they were required to implement required curriculum and mandated academic standards. The concept of time largely impacted preparedness to know how to incorporate Native cultural content, as well as finding time to learn about and teach Native cultural content. As reflected by a questionnaire respondent, "I follow the math and language arts curriculum that came with my classroom. If it has a Native American aspect to it, I teach it. If not, there is no time to be adding these to my lessons" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022). Teachers largely reported needing time to learn, prepare, and teach additional concepts that were outside of their required curriculum and standards.

Teachers who reported some level of preparedness and effectiveness to incorporate Indigenous cultural content identified nonlimiting factors, including support from principals who helped incorporate Native content into the daily school schedule and lessons, proximity of school district to tribal headquarters, and the teachers' abilities to locate and access resources that could

be incorporated into lessons. However, findings also show that teacher perceptions of Native cultures were influenced by generalizations, or even inaccurate information, about Native American cultures found in the classroom curriculum. Data show that teachers in these rural Native communities recognized a gap between curricular inaccuracies and cultural accuracies when it came to Native American peoples. Teacher responses such as, "Our curriculum adds some Native American lessons but not much" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022), demonstrated teachers' insight into this awareness. While teachers recognized this deficit in curriculum, findings also show that teachers did not have alternative lessons or curricula to take its place. As teachers' beliefs of accountability to their school and students were formed, their perceptions of how effective they were to incorporate Indigenous cultural content in their learning environments was also reinforced.

Accountability to Learn from Professional Development

Additionally, data show that professional preparedness to incorporate Native cultural content was related to relevant content provided during professional development and trainings. Teachers believed that what principals and administrators provided to them during professional development and training is what should prepare them to be effective. One teacher shared her reflection of professional development by saying, "I learned about diversity but not Native American culture specifically" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022). Data show that professional development and training about how to create learning environments that supported Osage children were largely not provided, with only a handful of teachers sharing that their principals were able and willing to help teachers prepare their classrooms to receive Native children. One atypical response came from an early childhood teacher who shared,

> She [principal] would speak, and that was specific. She was talking about the Native kids, you know, how to provide for them, and to let us familiarize ourselves with them, and what their family lives are like, and what goes on in their homes, and things like that…Actually, she does that every year before school starts for us, and it's everybody from pre-K to 12 (personal communication, August 8, 2022).

While this teacher had an experience different than most other teachers, Native cultural trainings, professional development, and resources were found to inconsistently provide content for teachers to prepare them to be effective. Data show that the principals who were able to model support for Native students and cultures demonstrated to teachers a more developed sense of school-wide accountability when they shared knowledge about Osage children. Further, findings show that teachers who felt accountable in relation to their school district shared beliefs that all students benefited from learning about Indigenous cultures.

Moreover, data also show that teachers believed they are accountable for understanding the content of what they are prepared to teach. Teachers are provided with the basic resources to be prepared for academic curriculum in the classroom, but findings show that if they are required to incorporate Native cultural content, many teachers were not provided the correct materials to effectively incorporate this into their learning environments. Professional development and trainings that were disconnected from Indigenous cultures were also identified to be limitations for preparing teachers to incorporate Native cultural content. Teachers communicated that their beliefs of accountability in relation to their schools were impacted by how prepared they were through the resources and supports provided by the school district. As one teacher explained, "I live and teach in a Native American community; therefore, I have access to many different resources pertaining to Native Americans. However, if it is not in the curriculum, I am under a

time restraint" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022). When these beliefs were reinforced by school leaders, data show that teacher perceptions of preparedness and effectiveness were lower, limiting teachers' willingness or ability to incorporate Native cultural content into their learning environments.

Accountability to Understand School's Level of Support for Native Cultures

Data revealed that teachers' perceptions of preparedness was further influenced by what teachers believed to be true about their school's level of support for Indigenous cultural content. Data show that the level of support for Indigenous cultural content ranged from creating climates of inclusion of all cultures, to acknowledging and incorporating specific Indigenous cultures in the classroom. These views were reinforced through the resources and materials that the school district provided to teachers, and whether the teachers had access to resources and support through Native partnerships within the school. As this early childhood teacher explained, "If I were to reach out to somebody, I could probably get what I need or get additional stuff, but we don't have any contact [with Osage Nation]. I don't know anybody to even start with" (personal communication, September 9, 2022). Teachers communicated that they understood that Native partnerships were established at the administrative level, and not something they could circumvent their principals to seek on their own.

Data further show that schools located in communities where there is an Osage language department, or communities where there are also Osage tribal districts, tended to have stronger partnerships with the Osage Nation, more visible JOM interaction and resources, and more accessible cultural resources and supports available to teachers. Data also show that teachers who taught in schools that were located outside the proximity of the three Osage tribal districts were less likely to have visible, active partnerships with the Osage Nation inside the schools, and less

accessible cultural resources and supports available to teachers. The teachers who taught in schools with more visible and active partnerships with the Osage Nation and had access to cultural resources were better prepared to professionally support Native cultures. These teachers had Native cultures and concepts modeled to them from Osage language teachers and tutors, and these Osage language teachers and tutors were available to help guide the early childhood teachers in their classrooms.

Accountability to Self as a Professional Educator

The teachers' beliefs of accountability to themselves in relation to their school and students fluctuated when it came to incorporating Native cultural content into learning environments. Findings show that perceptions of feeling less prepared centered around not knowing enough cultural knowledge, and not having enough support from their school to incorporate Native cultural content. Further, data show that teachers had more positive perceptions of effectiveness when they felt more prepared to teach the cultural content they were responsible for. When teachers were faced with limitations, but intentionally chose to teach lessons because of the lesson having Native American aspects to it, teachers demonstrated professional agency and accountability to find solutions. Some teachers' feedback revealed that even when faced with curricular limitations, like lack of internal access to cultural materials and resources or teaching in a school with high academic expectations but no visible Osage partnership within the school, they relied on their professional agency find solutions. One teacher whose insight demonstrated this responsibility shared,

> They [students] find it interesting. I think a lot of that depends on the teacher…The only way for us to grow and change and be more accepting is knowledge. And so, you have to continue your quest for knowledge and as you become more knowledgeable on things, or

> as society as a whole changes, then your knowledge has to change, also (personal communication, May 25, 2022).

This teacher demonstrated a sense of accountability and agency to view concepts beyond what was provided for her from her school district.

Teachers who learned how to teach Native American content by learning from the children and community also felt more effective and prepared. These teachers were able to access the knowledgeable individuals around them to incorporate Native cultural content and concepts when they were not able to carry it out themselves. Conversely, data show fewer positive perceptions of effectiveness from teachers when they believed they lacked Native American knowledge, did not know how to use the Osage Nation lesson plans or lessons from the Oklahoma State Department of Education website, or did not know how to teach Native cultural topics or concepts. Findings show that teacher perceptions of effectiveness and preparedness to support Indigenous cultural content were influenced by what they believed about themselves as teachers in relation to their school and students. Teacher responses like, "While I don't have experience teaching Native American lessons, I do have the ability to find resources that could be incorporated into lessons" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022), show that teachers were willing to support Native cultures in the classroom even when they were not prepared by their schools to teach Native cultural concepts.

Poetic Vignette of Settler Innocence in Perceptions of Preparedness to Be Effective

District mandated curriculum has first priority.

I do not see a disconnect between Native students, in my experience.

There does seem to be a disconnect…

I primarily teach only reading and math to special education students.

I know enough but need more knowledge…

I do not have any training in this area.

I have a vague knowledge from learning from other tribal members who have volunteered in the classroom to teach Osage language and traditions…

I can't even get everything I need in my day.

I would love to attend professional development or work with a mentor to learn how to teach lessons or activities to support the culture of Native American students...

Things we are asked to teach are not factual.

Research Question 2 Summary

When teachers believed that supporting Native cultural content was important and meaningful to their students, teachers learned how to do it and were intentional about choosing or adapting learning environments to include Native American content, influencing teacher perceptions of effectiveness and preparedness to incorporate Indigenous cultural content in their learning environments. When teachers believed that there were limitations preventing them from supporting Native cultural content or that Native partnerships were not visible or utilized, teachers were less likely to incorporate Native cultural content in the learning environments, impacting their perceptions of effectiveness and preparedness to support Indigenous cultural content in their learning environments. However, data show that when teachers have the tangible supports, materials, and resources available to them, they perceived themselves as accountable and more effective to meet expectations. Findings show that when teachers feel accountable to the school and students, they relied on cultural resources and professional development to feel prepared and effective to include Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments.

The teachers who reported higher perceptions of effectiveness and preparedness to support Indigenous cultural content had resources and materials available to them through the Osage Nation, and professional development and trainings provided by the school supported the expectations communicated from administrators.

The morning sky darkened as the rain began to peck on the windows outside. I heard the distant rumble of thunder earlier as I glanced up at the thunderheads rolling in from the west. I cringed. Thunderstorms in Osage County always made my internet glitch, or worse, lose power altogether. As I looked at the sky from my window, I caught a glimpse of my own reflection. I looked like my father when he used to give me his 'Osage look.' No words, just lips together as his dark eyes spoke to me, telling me to behave. On the other side of the county, "Anne" was probably watching the storm roll away from where she was. I could hardly contain my eagerness as her picture popped up on my Zoom screen. As I fumbled with my mouse to unmute my computer, I glanced outside one more time just as the thunder cracked. "Behave," I told the sky with my 'Osage look,' as the sound of rain quickened outside…

Research Question 3: How do participants describe their confidence while incorporating Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments?

For this research question, triangulation of data show that early childhood teachers' perceptions of confidence to incorporate Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments depended on the teachers' expectations of who is responsible for teaching Native cultural content to children. The three categories of responsibility were identified as institutions of higher education, principals and administrators, and the Osage Nation. Teachers perceived: 1) colleges and universities as responsible to prepare them for what they need to know to be an

early childhood teacher, 2) school districts as responsible to provide the appropriate resources and supports to achieve what is expected of them, and 3) Native nations as responsible to teach Indigenous cultural content directly to students. Data show that while teachers were confident in incorporating state mandated academics and standards into their learning environments, they were not as confident to incorporate Indigenous cultural content. Each identified area of responsibility as it related to teachers' perceptions of confidence to incorporate Indigenous cultural content will be discussed.

Responsibility of Institutions of Higher Education to Prepare Teachers

As teachers shared their perceptions of confidence to incorporate Indigenous cultural content into learning environments, institutions of higher education were identified as holding the obligation to prepare teachers for what they should know. Teachers confidently described knowing how to arrange classrooms in ways that were conducive to early learning, constructing learning centers with materials that evoke critical thinking, and learning strategies aligned to early childhood pedagogy. Some of the teachers also reported through questionnaire and semi-structured interviews that they have or are currently returning to college to attend graduate programs to continue their education in the field, showing that teachers trust institutions of higher education to provide the essential skills they need for their profession.

However, when it came to confidence to incorporate Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments, teachers reported learning about Native cultures from retiring teachers or coworkers, and most reported that teaching Native cultural content was not something they were prepared for through higher education courses. Teacher responses from the questionnaire included, "My courses didn't prepare me," and "I have never been taught how to teach it" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022), which are phrased in ways which indicated that

the teachers did not feel responsible for not knowing what colleges and universities did not teach them. Because teachers talked about the pressures of passing teacher certification tests, obtaining licensure, creating lesson plans, and demonstrating their ability to confidently teach what is expected of them, data show that what teachers learned from higher education hold value for them professionally.

Degree sheets specific to the field of early childhood education and elementary education for the colleges and universities attended by questionnaire participants confirmed that overall, courses specific to Native American cultures were not part of the required coursework and programming for teachers. The required courses found on the degree sheets for each reported college and university were analyzed for presence of courses specific to Native American knowledges. Since the questionnaire encompassed teachers currently teaching or having experience teaching pre-K through third grade with licensure codes for early childhood and elementary education, degree sheets for both licensures were collected and analyzed to understand teacher perceptions of how their institutions of higher education prepared them to support Native cultures in their classrooms.

The table below organizes the colleges and universities attended by teachers participating in the questionnaire, evidence of Native-specific courses offered specific to early childhood and elementary education, and teachers' perceptions of themselves as prepared to incorporate Indigenous cultures into their learning environments.

Table 10

Teacher Perceptions of Institutions of Higher Education to Prepare Them to Incorporate Indigenous Cultures into Learning Environments

Institution of Higher Education	Degree Type	Degrees Reported	AI/AN Courses- Early Childhood Degree Sheet	AI/AN Courses - Elementary Degree Sheet	Teacher Perceptions of IHE

Bacone College Muskogee, OK	Bachelor's	3	Yes-AIS American Indian Studies	Yes-AIS American Indian Studies	Not prepared
East Central University Ada, OK	Bachelor's Master's	2 2	Possibly	Possibly	Somewhat
Eastern Oklahoma State College Wilburton, OK	Associate	1	Not evident	Not applicable	Not prepared
Grand Canyon University Phoenix, AZ	Bachelor's	1	Not evident	Not evident	No Response
Kansas State University Manhattan, KS	Master's	1	Not evident	Possibly	Yes
Langston University Langston, OK	Bachelor's	1	Not evident	Not evident	Yes
Northeastern State University Tahlequah, OK	Bachelor's Master's	8 1	Not evident	Not evident	Not prepared
Northern Oklahoma College Tonkawa, OK	Associate	1	Not evident	Not evident	Not prepared
Northwestern Oklahoma State University; Alva, OK	Bachelor's	1	Possibly	Possibly	Somewhat
Oklahoma State University Stillwater, OK	Bachelor's Master's	2 1	Not evident	Not evident	Yes
Southeastern Oklahoma State University Durant, OK	Master's	1	Not evident	Not evident	Not prepared
Tulsa Community College Tulsa, OK	Associate	1	Not evident	Not applicable	Not prepared
University of Central Oklahoma Edmond, OK	Bachelor's	1	Not evident	Not evident	Yes
University of Oklahoma Norman, OK	Bachelor's Master's	2 1	Not evident	Not evident	Somewhat
University of Phoenix Tempe, AZ	Master's	1	Possibly	Possibly	No response
University of Tennessee at Martin Martin, TN	Bachelor's	1	Not evident	Not evident	Not prepared
Unreported College or University or 'Other' Degree	Associate Bachelor's Certificates	1 8 4	Not applicable	Not applicable	Somewhat

Note. This table organizes the institutions of higher education where participants attended, as reported from the questionnaire, along with the location, the type of degree earned, whether degree sheets for early childhood education and elementary education gathered through

document collection appeared to offer courses specific to Native American cultures, and the perceptions that teachers had of themselves to feel prepared to incorporate Native cultural content.

Courses specific to Native American cultures were not common on the degree sheets specific to early childhood education or elementary education requirements. Document collection revealed that most of the history requirements included courses that were specific to United States history before 1877 and United States history after 1877, but course offerings did not specifically indicate Native American cultures or histories as part of the requirements for the degree programs. For the courses that could possibly contain Native American cultures and histories, the course titles were, Diversity in American Education (East Central University, 2022), Cultural Diversity in the United States (University of Phoenix, 2022), Multicultural Education (Northwestern Oklahoma State University, 2022), and, Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners (Kansas State University, 2022). Of the colleges and universities reported by questionnaire respondents, 12 out of 16 were in Oklahoma, and from comparing degree sheets it appears that early childhood and elementary education courses in higher education did not specifically focus on preparing teachers to be able to incorporate Native cultural content upon program completion.

Additionally, teachers who had positive perceptions of feeling prepared to incorporate Native cultures in the classroom shared that they learned about Oklahoma history, learned how to choose diverse literature in early childhood, and learned how to meet families where they are. Only one response included a specific course number about instructing Indigenous students but a search from that for that specific course was not found on degree sheets. It is possible that this teacher had the professional or personal agency and interest to specifically chose to take a course

specific to Indigenous cultures, but overall, teachers relied on the pedagogy from higher education to adapt to cultural diversity in their own classrooms. For teachers who had positive perceptions of preparedness to support Native cultures in school, with no Native-specific course evident on the degree sheets, it is unknown how they felt prepared or if their professional experience aligned with views of Native American cultures taught by colleges and universities through multicultural diversity and special populations.

For teachers who took at least one course in higher education that specifically addressed Native American cultures, perceptions in creating learning environments that reflected Native American cultures were slightly to moderately confident, and slightly to moderately effective to incorporate Indigenous cultural content. As one early childhood teacher shared through the questionnaire, "As a group, we discussed the importance of integrating Native American culture into our classrooms and doing it in a way that all students feel included" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022). Overall, most teachers shared that living in Native communities and having resources was the most helpful.

Responsibility of Native Nations to Teach Native Cultures to Students

Data show that teachers viewed the Osage Nation more optimistically when the partnerships between the Osage Nation and schools were constructive and visible. Responses like, "We have [Osage] language classes with our students" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022), show how teachers view themselves invested in this partnership by using "we." The schools where these partnerships were perceived by teachers as effective and meaningful were also found to be in closer proximity to the Osage Nation headquarters, had an Osage Language Department or teachers in their community, or had other Osage cultural resources in their community available to them. Perceptions like, "It's so much a part of the culture that they see

every day going around town, or their friends" (personal communication, August 8, 2022), were found to come from early childhood teachers who view the general Osage community as responsible for teaching Native culture to students as community members. The teachers who perceived the Osage community as invested in the education of children also had partnerships with the Osage Nation language teachers and tutors within their schools.

Although teachers' perceptions toward the Osage Nation were less responsive when the Osage Nation partnerships were not visible in the schools, teachers still believed the Osage Nation was responsible for teaching Native cultural content to the students. Teachers who relied on the Osage Nation to be responsible for incorporating Native concepts did not incorporate it into their learning environments on their own, particularly when the partnership was non-existent, or when presence from the Native Nation was absent. Responses like, "The lack of presence of the Osage Nation in my community sets the tone for the entire district" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022), show just how much influence the Osage Nation has on teachers across Osage County.

Responsibility of Principals and Administrators to Provide the Necessary Resources for Teachers to Meet Expectations

Triangulation of data also show that teachers relied on their principals and administrators to provide them with the appropriate resources and supports to correspond with teacher requirements and expectations. Teachers described being provided the required curriculum and daily schedules that they were expected to follow, along with professional development content that was found to support the Oklahoma academic standards, school academic policies, and academic content. Teachers offered insight into professional development and in-service trainings, and most had never been offered any specific trainings that helped to incorporate

Indigenous cultural content. For some teachers, the professional development and training content was not supportive of early childhood education in general. A young, ambitious teacher who worked at an early childhood development center before teaching preschool in public school shared,

> I will say that a lot of our trainings are geared more towards higher grades, not so much for pre-K…We did one through the Osage Nation, I think maybe the counseling center, but it was a substance abuse training…I know not everything is catered towards pre-K, I'll just put it that way (personal communication, September 9, 2022).

If Native-specific professional development and trainings were not provided or offered, teachers did not view themselves as being responsible to incorporate Native cultural content.

While the dynamics of school cultures varied between sites and districts, the expectations communicated to teachers by their principals and administrators influenced their perceptions of confidence to incorporate Indigenous cultural content. Teachers relied on their principals and administrators to provide the necessary resources to be successful to in the classroom. The content of professional development and trainings, curricular decisions and resources, scheduling, and maintenance of Native partnerships at the administrative level communicated impacted teachers' perceptions of confidence. The incorporation of Indigenous cultural content as part of these expectations was determinate upon whether or not responsibility to do so was communicated to teachers by their principals and administrators. Teachers relied on their district administrators to provide to them what is necessary to be successful, including resources and supports to incorporate Native cultural content. When teachers did not have clear expectations or guidance to carry out the incorporation of Indigenous cultural content, teachers referred to the resources that were available to them, and perceived Native concepts as something extra to

incorporate if time allowed. Responses like, “My lessons are restricted to what I am allowed to teach in my classroom to align with the current district curriculum” (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022), and “How are you going to make anyone fit in what we’ve got” (personal communication, June 10, 2022) show the expectations of responsibility that are communicated to teachers.

Data show that teacher’s perceptions of confidence to support student academic achievement and to incorporate the Oklahoma academic standards were reinforced by curricular materials, time and scheduling, and content of teacher trainings that reinforced the expectations that principals and administrators had for them. The more teachers taught these lessons, the more confident they became. As one teacher explained, “We’ve had this curriculum for three years, and it’s a lot easier now” (personal communication, September 9, 2022), as she went on to explain how she plans to integrate other content now that she knows what skills are taught in which unit. Data show that teachers figured out how to teach what was expected of them if the expectation was communicated by principals and administrators. Teachers in this study were not lacking the will to incorporate Indigenous cultural content, but they were limited by clear expectations, cultural resources, and the presence of the Osage Nation partnerships in their schools to figure out a way to find solutions to carry this out in their classrooms.

Regardless of teacher ethnicity, school site or location, or level of partnerships with the Osage Nation, nearly all early childhood teachers expressed the need for Native cultural content and instruction that is written or explicitly provided for them. Since teacher confidence to teach academic content was supported by tangible resources, findings show that for teachers to confidently incorporate abstract Native cultural content, lessons need to be written or clearly specified. From the questionnaire, teachers made comments like, “It would have to be something

that is written for me" (anonymous, questionnaire, May 2022), which also supports that there exists limited texts and literature specific to Indigenous cultures available to teachers and children. Teacher confidence to incorporate Indigenous cultural content was related to information that is written or clearly provided, and regardless of teachers' individual cultures, Native cultural content needed to be more concrete than oral stories for teachers to feel confident to incorporate it in their learning environments.

Responsibility of Teachers to Support Native Cultures to Students

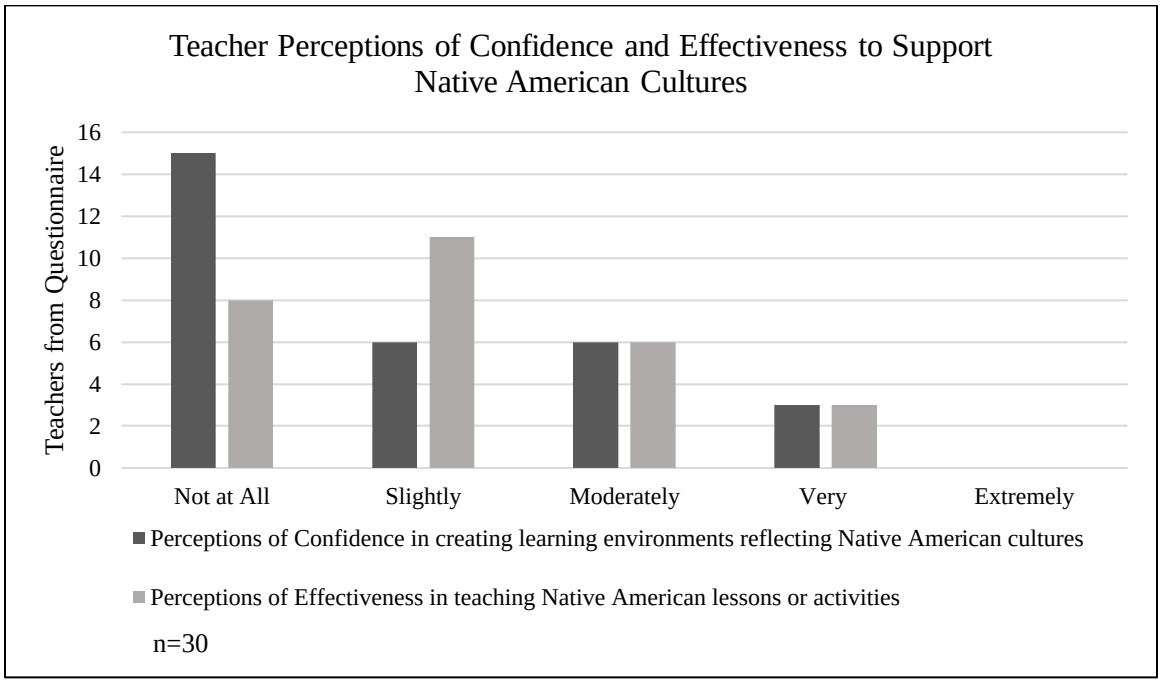
Overall, teachers reported lower levels of confidence to incorporate Indigenous cultures when they perceived themselves as the ones responsible for carrying it out, or when they felt like they were unqualified to teach Native cultural content to children. Teachers reporting lower levels of confidence to support Native cultures in the classroom also shared what they needed, including training, time, support, and resources to help them teach Indigenous cultural content. They also shared that low or no confidence was in part due to having no concept or experience of Native cultures themselves or perceiving themselves has having no culture or not being Native American. Teachers attempted to overcome these barriers by creating inclusive learning environments that were accepting of all cultures. Data show that teachers did feel responsible to support Native cultures in their classrooms, and with clear direction and resources, teachers could be more confident in supporting Native cultural content.

The table below illustrates the perceptions gathered from questionnaire responses regarding teacher perceptions of confidence and teacher perceptions of effectiveness to support Native American cultures in the classroom. Teachers were asked to rate their perception levels from the questions, "How would you rate your effectiveness in teaching Native American

lessons or activities," and "How would you rate your confidence in in creating learning environments that reflect Native American cultures?"

Table 11

Teacher Perceptions of Confidence and Effectiveness to Support Native American Cultures



Note. This graph organizes the questionnaire respondents' perceptions of confidence in creating learning environments that reflect Native American culture, and perceptions of effectiveness in teaching Native American lessons or activities. From the data collected, teachers perceived themselves as less confident to create learning environments that reflect Native American cultures, than to effectively teach Native American lessons or activities.

...As I spoke to Anne, I felt her gentleness and patience emanate from her voice. She had decades of experience teaching early childhood in Osage County and there was something about her disposition that made her stand out. Yes, she had lesson plans and created hands-on learning experiences for her children. She did not change the curriculum, yet she knew how to teach

Osage children. But I could not quite place it. With the storm now overhead, I leaned in closer to my computer, holding on to every word she said. I quickly jotted notes in my research journal. Anne knew that her Osage children were quiet, reserved, and preferred to be with their families. She knew exactly how to set up her classroom environment so the children felt safe and able to learn. She knew how to welcome Osage children into school and so did her coworkers. What was different? Were my research questions missing something? I asked everything I knew to ask, and I still could not figure out how her school's professional development each year taught her and her coworkers how to recognize and support Native children, while other schools did not. As I was glancing back through my notes to make sure I was not missing something, I heard it. Four words. As Anne continued to share more about her teaching experience, I scribbled what I had just heard: "My principal is Osage."

Research Question 3 Summary

Findings show that teacher perceptions of confidence were influenced by their attitudes about who is responsible for incorporating Native cultural content in learning environments. Findings show that when expectations were clearly communicated and teachers knew who was responsible for incorporating Native cultures, perceptions of confidence were reinforced. Triangulation of data show that there were three different positions of responsibility viewed by teachers: 1) institutions of higher education as responsible to provide the content necessary for teachers to be prepared to teach in their field, 2) Native nations as responsible to teach Native cultural content to students, and 3) school districts as responsible to provide the resources and supports for teachers to meet expectations. The most influential influence impacting teachers' perceptions of confidence was how principals and administrators communicated expectations regarding Native cultural content through professional development and training content,

partnerships with the Osage Nation, resources and materials, and time to help teachers successfully incorporate Native cultural content. When communication was clear and teachers understood who was responsible for teaching Native cultures to children in school, teacher perceptions of confidence were reinforced.

Identification of Themes

As data were analyzed, the identification of themes emerged through several cycles of coding and using tools for discourse analysis. The themes that were prominently conveyed from findings were specific and stretched across all research questions. The themes that emerged through the data analysis process were:

1. Access barriers in schools determine how teachers are able to create learning environments for, about, and with Native children.
2. If teachers are responsible for teaching Native cultures, Indigenous concepts need to be written or explicitly provided for them.
3. Teachers can teach whatever they are prepared to teach.
4. Native principals and administrators can elevate Native cultural existence in schools from surviving to thriving.

Along with a discussion for each of them, a word cloud was generated to illustrate the most frequently used words from all data collection methods from this study. This word cloud is significant in showing that from all data gathered from this study, the words, “school,” “student,” “education,” “parent,” “district,” and “policy,” are among the most frequently used words. Some of the least used words illustrated from this graphic are, “Native,” “Osage,” and “tribe.” This representation of words used is noteworthy when considering the Native American population in

the 13 site schools for this study, of which 12 schools are designated JOM Osage Reservation/Osage County site schools.

Figure 8

Word Cloud of All Data Sources

Note. This word cloud illustrates the most frequently used words from the semi-structured interviews, questionnaire responses, and documents collected from this study. It was generated from the words spoken and written from the data collection methods and provides a visual representation of the words from the data collected. The table below organizes keywords specific to this study.

Table 12

Comparison of Keywords from Word Frequency of All Data Sources

Word From All Data Sources	Number of Times Used	Weighted Percentage
School	4,724	2.08%
Student	3,463	1.52%
Education	1,619	0.71%
District	958	0.42%
Parent	921	0.41%
Policy	813	0.36%
Native	180	0.08%
Osage	127	0.06%
Tribe	24	0.01%

Note. This table shows the number of times the words significant to this study were used across all data sources and the weighted percentage of the word in relation to all words in the data.

Theme 1: Access barriers in schools determine how teachers are able to create learning environments for, about, and with Native children.

This theme emerged during the data analysis process, specifically when triangulating the data to make meaning from what teachers were communicating about decision-making, confidence, effectiveness, and preparedness to support Native cultural content. The concept of access barriers was uncovered when trying to untangle the influences and impacts that affected early childhood teachers in this study. Access barriers were found to exist in all the site schools within the bounds of this case, and these hidden barriers were found to either limit or permit Native cultures to flourish in schools, such as partnerships, communication, resources, and

support through trainings and professional development. From the data, teachers communicated that their principals and administrators directly influenced these barriers, which was evidenced by the varying levels of Osage Native partnerships that existed across the schools in Osage County. It is important to identify how these access barriers determined teacher preparedness to confidently and effectively create learning environments that are for, about, and with Native children.

Access barriers emerged from the data by analyzing what was being communicated through all data collection methods. The words and phrases that teachers communicated through semi-structured interviews, narratives, and questionnaire responses when referring to limitations to incorporate Indigenous cultural content helped put this into context. When teachers referred to their principals and administrators, they tended to use words like, "they," or, "their," instead of possessive wording like, "my" principal. This type of phrasing communicated that teachers position their school leaders on a hierarchy or different status than themselves. Teachers also tended to use "we" when talking about limitations, as well. Phrases like, "we don't," or, "we can't," also indicated that teachers do not want to be singled out, or that discipline is seen as a potential consequence for them. When teachers shared accomplishments or aspects of teaching that they were proud of, they were more likely to take ownership and use the words, "my," and "I," such as, "I made this," or, "my students can read." By understanding the context of positionality from what was being communicated, access barriers began to surface from the data.

Once this theme emerged, the data were looked at from different perspectives to further understand what was being communicated through teachers, by teachers, and to teachers. Two main distinctions from the data were discovered that show teachers can support Native cultures *if* and teachers can support Native cultures *because*. The data show that nearly all teachers

participating in this study were willing to incorporate Native cultural content *if* they had the proper resources, supports, trainings, and partnerships, or *because* they understood the importance, had the correct materials, saw it valued by school leaders, and had active partnerships with the Osage Nation. Interestingly, both mindsets showed willingness to support Native cultural content, but the difference was the types of external partnerships and resources that were permitted to support teachers internally in the schools through these access barriers. Early childhood teacher perceptions of Indigenous cultures were found to be wide-ranging but data show that the Osage Nation held value to influence the curricular decision-making processes to support Indigenous cultural content in learning environments if the Osage Nation was able to cross the access barriers at the administrative level in schools.

Since findings from the data show that early childhood teachers in Osage County public schools made decisions regarding Indigenous cultural content based on the prioritized values communicated to them by stakeholders, principals and administrators were in unique positions to expand Native cultural support by being intentional and strategic about who and what crossed the access barriers in schools. As illustrated from the word cloud, the public schools were highly focused on students, schools, parents, and educators, but when it came to Native-specific focus, the words, "Native," and "Osage," were much less defined from the collection of data. This finding confirms indications that varying levels of partnerships between schools and the Osage Nation existed, and that academic priority was found to be a valued priority for all schools.

Data show that teachers considered outcomes for incorporating Native cultural content, and the effects were perceived as having either positive or negative outcomes, depending on what principals communicated to the teachers. The effects that were perceived as having negative outcomes were fear of inaccurately representing Native cultures, worry about teaching

Native cultures in a disrespectful way, apprehension about upsetting Native parents or elders, and fear of discipline from the recent legislation regarding critical race theory in schools. Positive outcomes impacting teachers were teachers being able to connect to their Native students and families, understanding dispositions so Native children were less frustrated and more able to learn, and all children learning Osage values. These types of positive effects were found to be evident in schools that had more healthy, active partnerships with the Osage Nation, providing more precise understanding and clarity of Osage language and culture to help teachers in their classrooms.

The access barriers that existed at the leadership levels in schools were also found to impact how Native American cultures tended to be normalized through inclusion. The schools that had less visibility from the Osage Nation were also more likely to be inclusive of all cultures as a general concept. By engaging in active partnerships with the Osage Nation, classroom teachers were able to recognize Native cultural content as relevant and meaningful to incorporate into their classrooms. For these teachers, the access barriers were not limiting in fostering positive outcomes that afforded authentic connections to be made with teachers and all students. Further, Native children were able to experience an easier transition from home to school when the learning environments welcomed their cultures.

While the leadership of principals and administrators were not explicitly studied, making sense of what the teachers assumed or believe within their professional realm was important to understand how and why access barriers were identified as one facet of the figured world that teachers come to school believing. The social constructs within the schools were highly influenced by the school leaders, and teachers knew how to make sense of these paradigms of power within their schools. Specifically, early childhood teachers from this study inherently

understood the relationships that the principals, administrators, and Osage partnerships at the macro-level and meso-level had with the classroom teachers at the micro-level. These relationships affected how teachers made decisions with students, families, and teachers from the Osage Nation. When teachers said, “I am not allowed,” or, “I would need to be told,” understood systems of power within the school were revealed. The figured world that teachers were either told or intuitively understood that school leaders were the gatekeepers of the access barriers that exist within the schools. When teachers understood that the meso-level in the school influences the micro-level in the school, the access barriers became more visible. The word cloud above illustrates this by showing the most frequently used words from all data collection methods, which included “students,” “educator,” “school,” and, “parents,” and the words, “Native,” and, “Osage,” were used less frequently among all data sources. This showed what was being communicated to early childhood teachers in their professional environments. Specifically, teachers were more likely to incorporate Native cultural content in their learning environments when they saw Native cultures valued by their school principals and administrators.

Theme 1 Summary

Findings show that most early childhood teachers in this study were not lacking the will to incorporate Indigenous cultural content, and they articulated specific limitations that prevented them from carrying this out and what they would need to be able to effectively provide Native cultural content into their learning environments. Since the field of early childhood education characteristically focuses on the development of the whole child socially, emotionally, and cognitively, convincing early childhood teachers to incorporate Native cultural content was not a limitation, but the ways teachers navigated what educational leaders communicated to them impacted their decision-making processes regarding Native cultures in their classrooms. Early

childhood teachers in this study agreed with the developmental benefits children gain from seeing their own cultures reflected in their learning environments. However, the limitations inhibiting early childhood teachers were beyond the teachers' control, which were found to prevent them from being able to incorporate Native-specific content in their early learning environments. On the other hand, teachers who made decisions to incorporate Native cultural content into learning environments had clear communication from educational leaders and access to Osage partnerships and cultural resources.

Theme 2: If teachers are responsible for teaching Native cultures, Indigenous concepts need to be written or explicitly provided for them.

A prominent theme that began to emerge when triangulating the data was the ambiguity of who is responsible to support Indigenous cultures in the classroom, and how to teach unwritten concepts. When teachers described their perceptions of confidence to incorporate Indigenous cultural content into their learning environments, it became clear that there was much uncertainty about who was responsible to carry this out. The teachers' views of who is responsible to support Native cultures strongly affected their perceptions of confidence to incorporate Native cultural content in their learning environments. Specifically, teachers who reported higher perceptions of confidence had clear expectations of how to prepare learning environments that supported Native cultures modeled for them by their administrators and Osage language teachers. Clear expectations from administrators established an attitude of professional responsibility for the teachers to model the same expectations for their students. In the same vein, teachers who reported feeling little to no confidence to incorporate Indigenous cultural content reported administrators modeling more support for academics and assessments. When the expectations of who was responsible for supporting Native cultures were clearly defined,

teacher attitudes toward Indigenous cultures were more developed and influenced teacher perceptions of confidence to teach Native cultural content.

For teachers to view themselves as responsible for incorporating Indigenous cultural content, clear expectations needed to be communicated by principals and administrators, and school leaders needed to provide teachers the materials and resources to be successful to carry out expectations. Data show that when teachers were provided a specific curriculum, the teachers adhered to that curriculum. Interestingly, findings also show that even if teachers had prior experience teaching in a Native-specific environment or incorporating Native cultural content, they adjusted their decisions and performance to meet the expectations from their current principal and administrators. This shows that principals and administrators had the most direct influence on teachers, and the teachers followed through with the responsibilities and expectations communicated to them.

Knowing that teachers adjusted decisions and mindsets to meet the expectations of their principals and administrators, the resources and materials that school leaders provided had the potential to elevate Native cultural knowledge in the classroom for all students. Principals and administrators were in the position to communicate responsibility for teachers to support Native cultural content in an accurate and relevant ways. Further, findings show that teachers trusted written curriculum, and with the recent passing of HB-1775 that restricted how diversity and culture were taught in school and through professional development, teachers communicated a heightened sense of insecurity to teach anything other than what is written and provided by the school district. For Native cultures to be incorporated into learning environments, professional development and training specific to Native American cultures and partnerships with Native

nations needed to support what the teachers were responsible to teach in their classrooms, along with written lessons and texts that teachers could refer to.

Teachers who reported incorporating Native cultural content in their classrooms had clear expectations from their administrators about how they should approach Native cultures, and they devoted time in daily schedules to make sure this was accomplished. These teachers also reported visible partnerships with the Osage Nation and language teachers at their schools. School leaders had the opportunity to foster positive relationships and partnerships with Native nations, and the ways administrators approached Indigenous cultures communicated expectations to teachers. Additionally, teachers who saw the Osage Nation partnerships within their schools relied on the Osage teachers as being the main source of cultural knowledge. If teachers knew they were responsible for incorporating Indigenous cultural content, partnerships with the Osage Nation leveraged cultural understanding to higher levels among students and teachers.

Additionally, teachers reported their Native American children and school receiving support from the Osage Nation by providing classroom supplies, school supplies, sponsoring professional development in some cases, tutoring for Native American children, and the Book Mobile that traveled to schools to provide books and thematic tubs to help teachers supplement academics. For these teachers, the Osage Nation was perceived by teachers as being responsible for providing Native cultural content to students. However, when teachers knew that they were responsible for incorporating Native cultural content, the partnerships, resources, and materials were restructured to align with the classroom teachers as supports, ultimately benefiting all children.

Teachers needing to know who is responsible for incorporating Native cultural content, along with written lessons to help them teach Native cultural values was another facet to

teachers' figured world. Teachers came to school knowing that their principals and administrators communicated the values that they should reflect. The more aligned communicated responsibility, classroom resources, written materials, and professional development and trainings were to Indigenous cultures, the more confident, effective, and prepared teachers were to incorporate it into learning environments for all students.

It is important to note that findings did not reveal teacher perceptions as not responsible for past or present colonial structures, or teachers as not interested in knowing or coming to know about past or present colonial structures. What findings did reveal, however, is that the power of leaders within educational systems influenced teachers' agency to question or change the status quo within schools.

Theme 2 Summary

For teachers who relied on curriculum, lessons, and explicit concepts that can be documented for curriculum mapping and confirmation of content taught, teaching concepts that were ambiguous without support limited the opportunity for teachers coming to know about Native cultural knowledge. Teachers working in Native communities knew that Osage knowledges and the Osage language and orthography were highly respected by the Osage people. Teachers working and living in Native communities were not taught the traditional values and sovereign ways of the Osage Nation from institutions of higher education. However, they were able to identify the key people who could model and teach Osage values and stories: tribal members, Elders, and Osage language teachers and tutors. For teachers to be expected to incorporate accurate Native cultural content into their learning environments without being taught or supported, the exposure of Native knowledges to all children was limited. Providing

teachers with written concepts or explicit resources were needed if teachers were responsible for incorporating and teaching Native cultural content in public school learning environments.

Theme 3: Teachers can teach whatever they are prepared to teach.

Since teachers perceived their own effectiveness by how prepared and accountable they were to their school and students, this theme emerged from how and what teachers communicated through the data. Throughout the data analysis process, findings show that teachers recognized and acknowledged that Native cultures existed in their communities, schools, and classrooms, and nearly all teachers in this study expressed willingness to support and incorporate Native cultural content into their learning environments. However, they also communicated varying levels of knowing how to carry this out in their classrooms. While trying to make sense of what teachers did not know about teaching Native cultural content, what was immediately communicated is what teachers *do* know.

Data show that teachers knew how to align lessons and activities to Oklahoma teaching standards, use curriculum and lessons to cover academic priorities, and incorporate learning centers and experiences that are relevant to the lessons. Teachers knew how to prepare students for testing and assessments, how to manage daily schedules to meet expectations, and where to find academic materials and resources to support their lessons. Teachers had tangible resources, training, and professional support to incorporate academic content for their students. What teachers knew is that they could teach whatever they are prepared to teach. When Native histories and knowledges were abstract or unwritten teachers felt less prepared, if at all, to incorporate it into their learning environments. Findings show that when teachers were uncertain, they tended to teach what they were comfortable teaching. Knowing that teacher beliefs of accountability and preparedness influenced their perceptions of how effective they were for their

students, providing teachers with the correct cultural resources helped them be more effective to teach Native cultural content for all students.

Additionally, the data communicated political undertones that existed in public schools, which influenced how teachers approached the concepts of cultures and diversity in their classrooms. While these political undertones were not specifically researched, they must be acknowledged to understand how to support teachers to be better prepared to create learning environments that are for, about, and with Native children. The major political undertone that was identified was the recent passing of HB-1775, which prohibits Oklahoma teachers to specifically teach about race or critical race theory in school and prohibits schools to provide content in professional development to teachers related to this topic. This legislation further allowed schools to implement progressive discipline to teachers who were found to be in violation of the rules. Consequences for teachers could be discipline, loss of teacher license, or the school district losing accreditation status. With this political undertone looming over teachers, coupled with the ambiguity of Indigenous cultural content not being written or explicitly provided for teachers to refer to or follow, teachers needed support from principals and administrators about how to navigate this political nuance in rural communities with significant populations of Native American children and families.

A third facet of teachers' figured world they came to school believing is that they could teach whatever they were prepared to teach. Their perceptions of effectiveness to include Indigenous cultural content into learning environments for all children were strengthened when their school systems demonstrated cultural responsibility. The differences between the teachers who felt better prepared to support Native cultures in their classrooms and those who did not, recognized that they taught in schools that were connected to the cultures in their communities or

had active partnerships with the Osage Nation. These schools played active roles in the partnerships by allowing Osage language teachers and tutors to come inside the school, and school leaders adjusted daily schedules to allow time for Native cultural content to be integrated. Schools listened to Native students and families and learned from them. School leaders allowed families to come to classrooms to teach cultural lessons, and some teachers reported learning most of the Native culture directly from their Native children. The Osage language teachers helped the classroom teachers incorporate Osage words, phrases, and orthography into academic lessons to teach Osage values to all children, and school leaders created opportunities for Native cultures to be seen and heard by all children.

Theme 3 Summary

Whitestream dominance in curricula, professional development, and course requirements from institutions of higher education working to prepare students to become early childhood teachers were found to impact teachers' perceptions of confidence, efficacy, and preparedness to make decisions that support Native culture in public school classrooms. Teachers were found to be impacted at the meso-level from principals and administrators in the public schools. Classroom teachers relied on their curriculum to provide day to day instruction and plan activities for their children, even when they recognized that the Native American content was often inaccurate or even missing, Teachers did not know how to incorporate Native content that was missing or know what resources to use instead. While early childhood teachers in public schools were willing to teach Native cultural content, they communicated the need for more support and resources to be able to carry this out in their classrooms.

Additionally, many teachers who felt underqualified to teach Native American concepts shared that they felt they were not capable because they were white. Teachers believed that if

they were not Native American, they did not have the fundamental knowledges necessary to teach children about Native cultures, especially to Native children. While this acknowledgement of seeing oneself as capable and responsible to teach Native American concepts through reflection and evaluation is a step toward critical consciousness, believing that they cannot teach it because they are not Native American themselves shows that settler innocence exists in educator mindsets. Teachers preferred to teach what was comfortable and familiar for them to teach, or what they were prepared to teach. The teachers who overcame limitations and were able to incorporate Native cultural content were influenced from the educational leaders in their schools who permitted Native partnerships and resources to be accessible to teachers.

Theme 4: Native principals and administrators can elevate Native cultural existence in schools from surviving to thriving.

This theme emerged from the data by a discovering a distinction in characteristics in teachers, educational leaders, and schools where access barriers were not limiting, and where Native cultures seemed to be thriving in classrooms. The significant element that linked cultural content inside classrooms to cultural purpose outside the classroom and in the Native communities were school principals and administrators who were Osage. These Native educational leaders provided an exclusive dynamic to their school that communicated to teachers a cultural responsibility to be advocates for Native children. Native school leaders were in positions to elevate Native knowledges that already existed in these schools from surviving to thriving. As one non-Native public school teacher beautifully articulated, the principal provided specific professional development to all staff, expressing how Native children should and can be supported in their learning environments. The teachers were reminded about subtle behaviors that Native children bring with them to school, and ways teachers can create nurturing learning

environments to receive them into their classrooms. Since Native children typically tended to be quieter and more reserved than their non-Native classmates, teachers were provided with the correct resources and trainings to welcome and support Native children in the school. For some Native children, pre-K was their first exposure to school. Teachers' expectations were clear from their principal, and teachers knew how to incorporate Indigenous cultural content into their regular school curriculum and adjust learning environments to support Native children who preferred to stay with their families and were slower to warm up. Teachers were encouraged by their Native principal to keep Native American children a priority when creating learning environments for all children.

Theme 4 Summary

This theme emerged from a significant finding that was present in one Native community's public school and stood out because it was not found in the other site schools. When the educational leaders in public schools were Native American, it was found to make a significant shift in commitment from the teachers to support Native children and cultures in early learning environments. As the teacher shared, there were no pushbacks from her colleagues to support Native cultures because they understood the relevancy and how this connected to the children and families in their Native community. The teachers still used the same curriculum for all children, but because the Native principal helped them understand how to create and develop early learning environments, along with the Osage language teachers and tutors who were accessible resources to the teachers, incorporating Native cultural content was elevated from surviving to thriving in school.

Researcher Positionality

It is important to recognize my position as a researcher in the Osage community. The contexts of interaction with teachers from this study overlap across different spaces and it is worth noting the impression that this study has had on teachers' intellectual sovereignty. Since data collection and analysis, I have had several casual interactions with teachers across the county who approached me to quickly mention how the questionnaire has made them think differently about lessons, and that they were glad to see something being done for the Native American children at school. These interactions show that building trust and positive relationships within the educational community have the potential to further impact intellectual sovereignty.

From an Osage perspective, there were specific cultural nuances that were recognized throughout the data collection process that should be acknowledged and respected to understand the context of the findings. As the findings show, more Native American participants were willing to take the questionnaire than those willing to participate in the semi-structured interview. Despite multiple attempts to contact Native American teachers for a semi-structured interview, only two were willing to meet with me, while 43% of the participants who were willing to report their tribal affiliation in the questionnaire were Native American. This nuance could have been influenced by historical trauma and a systemic lack of trust from outsiders by the Native American teachers. This could also be potentially influenced by Native American teachers who have tribal membership but are culturally disconnected or hesitant to talk publicly about Native topics for fear of being wrong. Knowing this, it was very important to approach this carefully and respectfully to avoid Native American teachers feeling "othered." In striving to

connect with teachers in a trusting way, I made sure to acknowledge my Osage citizenship in email solicitations and points of contact.

Summary of Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter provided a description of the findings gathered during this study. The findings were connected to each research question, and data were analyzed through first and second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2009; 2016), discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) and document analysis (Bowen, 2009). The themes that emerged were connected across all research questions and data sources, then articulated through thematic representation by using vignettes and poetic vignettes of in vivo codes to allow teachers' voices to speak through the data. The findings show that the themes that emerged from the data were:

1. Access barriers in schools determine how teachers are able to create learning environments for, about, and with Native children.
2. If teachers are responsible for teaching Native cultures, Indigenous concepts need to be written or explicitly provided for them.
3. Teachers can teach whatever they are prepared to teach.
4. Native principals and administrators can elevate Native cultural existence in schools from surviving to thriving.

These themes describe the findings that were communicated from triangulation of data. A description of how these themes connect to the literature and theoretical frameworks informing this study, the significance of this study, and recommendations for future research will be provided in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 - Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore early childhood teachers' decision-making processes and their perceptions of preparedness, confidence, and efficacy to incorporate Indigenous cultural content into public school early learning environments. This chapter will connect the findings from this study to the literature informing this study. This chapter will conclude with recommendations for extending this information to improve the education for Native children and educational goals of the Osage Nation, along with a discussion regarding opportunities for future research.

Connection of Findings to Literature

This section will connect the findings from this study to the literature. Specifically, this section will make connections to literature related to American Indian education, the policies impacting education for Native American students, and connections to critical Indigenous frameworks, as well.

American Indian Education

Given the Eurocentric efforts that traumatically worked to Americanize Indigenous children through boarding schools and assimilation into American culture, discovering present-day limitations in local public schools where there were significant populations of Native American children and families was significant. The first connection of findings to literature begins by understanding that the assimilationist histories that have shaped education for Native children and families are still present in public schools today. Although Indigenous educational systems have been in place since time immemorial, prior to the arrival of European settlers (Brayboy et a., 2018; RedCorn, 2020; Pewewardy et al., 2018), the federal government

attempted to civilize Native peoples and develop schooling for Native children. Through missions and boarding schools, the task for teachers in these schools for Native children was to, "kill the Indian, save the man" (NIEA, 2019; Carlisle Indian School Project, 2020). Today, the Eurocentric thread that is woven throughout educational systems maintains teachers at the status quo of being fully prepared to teach Eurocentric concept, not Native cultures and histories.

From a tribal perspective, the Osage Nation's interest in the educational sovereignty of their children is detailed in the Osage Nation's 25-year strategic plan (Osage Nation, 2007; 2018; 2020), which outlines early education goals for Osage children. Additionally, the Osage Nation has developed early learning centers and a new birth through 5th grade elementary school, and the Osage Nation Education Department and Osage Language Department have employees who work in public schools as liaisons and language teachers. Since Native nations have the inherent right to self-governance and education (RedCorn et al., 2019), the Osage Nation is actively making efforts to partner with public schools across Osage County. These Osage language teachers work with the classroom teachers in public schools to show them how to incorporate Osage language, orthography, and cultural content. The Osage language teachers are a vital resource to provide the resources and knowledges necessary to incorporate Native cultural content in public schools. The history of the Native nation's inherent right to educational sovereignty connects to Theme 3: *Teachers can teach whatever they are prepared to teach*, as active partnerships with the Osage language teachers provide classroom teachers with the resources necessary to be able to teach Native concepts to all children.

Additionally, literature shows that 93% of Native children attend public schools across the nation (NIEA, 2019), and that the impacts of the removal histories and forced migrations over the last two centuries are still not been fully understood (Bowes, 2014). This information

provides a distinct opportunity to reframe what American Indian education looks like for Osage and other Native children attending public schools. Sabzalian (2019) emphasizes that knowledge about the survivance of Native peoples, settler colonialism, and Native-centered studies should be a requirement for teacher knowledge. This also connects to Theme 3: *Teachers can teach whatever they are prepared to teach*. Since teachers rely on higher education to prepare them for the classroom and knowing how American Indian education has been shaped throughout history, preparing teachers to interrupt settler colonial discourses (Sabzalian, 2019) is needed to improve teacher development and cultural responsiveness.

Policies Impacting the Education of Native American Students

The policies that are in place at the federal, state, and local levels directly impact schools, and connections can be made to the themes from this study. At the federal level, the government has an obligation to help provide Native nations with education through the federal trust responsibility (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2022; RedCorn et al., 2019), and Johnson O'Malley (JOM) contracts for the education of Native students in public schools by subsidizing education and other services provided by the state to Native students (Bureau of Indian Education, 2021). Of the 13 schools within this study, 12 schools were designated as Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site schools. These federal policies have direct impacts on schools located in rural, Native communities, and the educational leaders are in place to help teachers understand these policies and how they affect the school.

Further, Title VI of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that all schools in Oklahoma participate in a mandatory tribal consultation with tribal agencies (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2016). A tribal consultation is required of all local education agencies that receive more than $40,000 in Title VI funding or with enrollment of at least 50% American

Indian or Alaska Native students (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2016). Through these tribal consultations, Native nations meet with school administrators to discuss how to best serve Native children in the schools and to strengthen the partnerships between the schools and Native nations for the education of Native American students. These policies, along with the information provided to public school administrators from the Native nations, impacts the ways schools support Native cultural content and students. These policies and the ways school administrators communicate this information to teachers connects to Theme 1: *Access barriers in schools determine how teachers are able to create learning environments for, about, and with Native children*. These policies specifically connect to the information and resources that teachers should have access to when teaching in rural, Native communities.

Additional policies that were of high concern and priority were the HB-2957 regarding the Oklahoma Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Evaluation (TLE) and HB-1775 regarding critical race theory in public schools. Because these two policies directly affect teacher performance and job security, as well as have implications for funding and accreditation for schools, these policies have an impact on teachers and school administrators. The TLE evaluation policy requires teachers to be put on plans of improvement if not meeting expectations for the teacher domains, which adds a layer of apprehension for teachers to teach content beyond the scope of what they are required. Also, because of the newness of the critical race theory policy in Oklahoma, and the discipline to teachers and school districts associated with violation of the policy, teachers are becoming more reliant on what is written or provided to them to teach. These policies connect to Theme 2: *If teachers are responsible for teaching Native cultures, Indigenous concepts need to be written or explicitly provided for them*.

Moreover, the teacher preparation programs and courses from institutions of higher education are assumed to develop teachers to know how to support all children in early childhood classrooms. Of the 172,525 college students enrolled in the field of education in 2018-2019, 14,503 students were American Indian or Alaska Native (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2021). This shows that not only do Native children have the opportunity to see their own cultures reflected by their teachers, but these Native teachers also have the potential to advance in their field to potentially be in leadership positions within their schools. Institutions of higher education have the ability to develop not only teacher candidates, but also educational leaders. Colleges and universities have the potential to supporting Native knowledges through teacher development courses and can be connected to Theme 4: *Native principals and administrators can elevate Native cultural existence in schools from surviving to thriving*. Recognizing that Native educational leaders can impact Native cultural existence in schools from surviving to thriving, universities could engage in marketing and recruitment efforts to further develop Native educational leaders.

Critical Indigenous Frameworks

The theories and frameworks specific to American Indian education relevant to this study provided the contextual and cultural support to be able to situate this study appropriately within the public schools in rural, Native communities. The model from Transformational Indigenous Praxis (Pewewardy et al., 2018) served as a framework to demonstrate and assess the different levels of critical consciousness within professions and communities, as well as ways to recognize the whitestream dominance that exists in public schools through curriculum and academia. It is critical for educational leaders to assess their own critical consciousness if whitestream dominance is to be dismantled. Pewewardy et al. (2018; 2022) provides the Transformational

Indigenous Praxis as a tool for assessing critical consciousness, as well as the Wave Jumping model to show how those working towards critical consciousness can overcome the influences working against them. These models of critical consciousness bring clarity and structure to educational leaders and teachers to assess their professional landscape and community, along with their own critical consciousness.

Additionally, Red Pedagogy works toward Indigenous self-determination by creating the space for Native scholars to undo Western theory and to build partnerships with Native communities to build Indigenous liberation (Grande, 2000). In this framework, Grande (2000) addresses whitestream dominance working against Indigenous scholars and intellectual sovereignty, which maintains white scholarship in academia. Similarly, TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2006) challenges the notion of accepting the experiences of whites as the norm, or standard, and provides a framework developed from critical race theory, rooted in Native communities and individuals. These critical Indigenous frameworks are necessary and should be used by educational leaders and teachers working directly with children in public schools, specifically in Native communities, to assess themselves and their professional landscape to remove the white dominance working against Native knowledges. These frameworks connect to Theme 1: *Access barriers in schools determine how teachers are able to create learning environments for, about, and with Native children*. The critical consciousness of educational leaders impacts the professional community.

Community Based Qualitative Research

Community based qualitative research emphasizes that research includes community members as active participants (Johnson, 2017), and one of the primary goals for this type of research is to use the findings from the research to enact change to make improvements in the

community through policy and programs (Johnson, 2017). Community based qualitative research allows the researcher to take an active role to engage in reflection of participants' experiences and perspectives of community members, and to participate in the solution to problems (Johnson, 2017). Community based qualitative research opens the door to identify the key stakeholders specific to education for students in Native communities.

Moreover, Insurgent Research is a critical Indigenous framework that focuses on recentering community and focuses on reclaiming and making agreeable relationships and building effective Indigenous knowledges (Gaudry, 2011). The guiding principles from this community based Indigenous framework situate Indigenous communities as the final judges of the validity and effectiveness of the research. Insurgent Research operates within the values determined by the relationship to Indigenous communities, making it different than other research methodologies that are done *on* Indigenous peoples as outsiders and translated into the worldviews of the dominant culture (Gaudry, 2011).

These frameworks can used to identify key educators within Native communities and build effective relationships that support Native knowledges in public schools. These frameworks are connected to Theme 4: *Native principals and administrators can elevate Native cultural existence in schools from surviving to thriving*, to work from inside the community and Native communities to find solutions to actualize Native education for all children.

Connection of Findings to Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks provided the structure to situate this revelatory case study in a purposeful way to be able to understand the unique ways early childhood public schools in Native communities support Indigenous children and cultures. The theoretical frameworks used

were *Liberating Sovereign Potential* (RedCorn, 2020), settler innocence (Lees et al., 2021), and perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012), and their connections to research will be discussed.

Liberating Sovereign Potential

Liberating Sovereign Potential asserts that in order for educational sovereignty to be unlocked, cultural knowledge and understanding must first be understood in context to the whole system, as well as external influences, including curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching and leadership styles (RedCorn, 2020). In order to do this, the *Liberating Sovereign Potential* model identifies the specific areas of education that must be addressed, which include assessing the educational landscape and identifying community assets, fostering professional growth across systems, development and alignment of systems, and fostering a healthy community of practice across all systems (RedCorn, 2020). This model is particularly useful at the leadership level to determine how the educational system as a whole can be assessed and recentered to support Indigenous peoples and communities through educational sovereignty.

The *Liberating Sovereign Potential* model provided the structure to position the Osage-centered context into this study, as well as situating the findings into a broad Osage-centered systems thinking and perspectives. This model is further supported by Drent and Dennison (2021), which encourages Native nations to build on existing discussions and reintroduce Indigenous values into modern governance and systems. The specific tenet that this study aligned to was Assess the Educational Landscape and Identifying Community Assets. Within this tenet, RedCorn (2020) suggests identifying the significant areas of need by:

1. Mapping the educational systems of influence and access points
2. Identifying skilled and knowledgeable educators within community cultural systems

3. Identifying skilled and knowledgeable educators withing within Native Nation's governance structures
4. Assessing the level of Native representation, including allies, in community's professional educator ecosystem
5. Assessing the level of critically conscious collective efficacy across the educator ecosystem
6. Identifying and prioritizing areas of need for fostering professional growth (p. 9-14).

From this framework, the tenet that was specifically used as a lens to approach the study was Assess the Educational Landscape and Identifying Community Assets. This lens allowed for a critical exploration of the early childhood teachers' perceptions of Native knowledges and constructs in public schools and identify the role of Native communities in public education. Within this tenet, Theme 1: *Access barriers in schools determine how teachers are able to create learning environments for, about, and with Native children* directly connects to mapping the educational systems of influence and access points. Educational leaders were identified as either limiting or permitting Native partnerships to be present in the school.

Further, the skilled and knowledgeable educators within community cultural systems were identified as Native educational leaders, Osage language teachers and tutors, and Native children and families. Along with Native principals and administrators influencing the access barriers in school to allow Osage language teachers and tutors into school, there is also an opportunity to use Native children and families as teachers of cultural knowledge in the classroom. For critical consciousness to be unlocked, the skilled and knowledgeable educators need to be identified to elevate intellectual sovereignty, connecting to Theme 4: *Native principals and administrators can elevate Native cultural existence in schools from surviving to*

thriving. Allowing Native children and families to teach cultural knowledges, all children and teachers can see accurate reflections of Native cultures and peoples modeled in the classroom.

Additionally, when coupled with the skilled and knowledgeable educators working within the Native Nation's structures, such as the Osage Nation Secretaries, Directors, and Elders working within the Osage Nation, teachers' perceptions of confidence and effectiveness to incorporate Native cultural content into learning environments are strengthened. By having access to teaching supports, resources, and clarification of cultural questions, teachers will be better prepared to teach Native concepts, connecting to Theme 3: *Teachers can teach whatever they are prepared to teach*. By including the skilled and knowledgeable educators working within the Osage Nation's governance structures, all children will have the opportunity to see modern-day Native professionals interacting within the community, tribe, and schools. This additional layer of partnership between the Osage Nation and public schools could work to dismantle stereotypes or inaccurate portrayals of Native Americans seen in curricular content.

Moreover, the level of Native representation from communities' professional educator ecosystem was discovered in two different ways. While there was Native representation *physically* from Native classroom teachers, Native principals and administrators, and Native school board members, Native representation as a *concept* was only present when access barriers permitted Native partnerships within the schools. This study found that Native cultural content was incorporated into early learning environments by both Native and non-Native teachers with support from Osage partnerships. This finding is notable by showing that non-Native teachers are capable of incorporating Indigenous cultural content with support from Osage language teachers and tutors, which connects to Theme 2: *If teachers are responsible for teaching Native cultures, Indigenous concepts need to be written or explicitly provided for them*. Since the Osage language

teachers and tutors who work with classroom teachers understand what teachers want and need, including Osage language teachers and tutors in school-wide professional development and trainings would be beneficial for the public schools. Representation from Native professional educators can provide valuable feedback and insight about how to connect the relevancy of Native cultures to curricular content and during professional development and trainings. As the teachers identified specific influences impacting how they adjust decisioning, including curriculum, internal structures and policies, the tenet, "Development and alignment of systems" (RedCorn, 2020), would also overlap with findings.

The level of critically conscious efficacy across educator systems is part of this tenet, and the ways teachers perceived themselves as effective to incorporate Indigenous cultural content confirmed that teachers come to school with varying levels of critical consciousness. While being critically conscious is necessary for educators to recognize Indigenous cultures in educational systems, connecting critical consciousness to efficacy is what extends awareness of Native cultures to application of knowledge, moving educator ecosystems toward educational sovereignty.

By understanding teachers' perspectives and the figured worlds they come to school knowing and believing, educational leaders have an opportunity to reflect and readjust access barriers to support teachers and Native partnerships, allowing the other tenets of the *Liberating Sovereign Potential* model to flourish. From this study, teachers identified needing professional development and trainings that specifically focus on ways the school and early learning environments are structured and designed to be able to receive Native American children in their classrooms. Teachers also identified the need for time to learn and teach Native concepts, and the need to invite Native guest speakers, Elders, dancers, and families into the classroom as co-

teachers of cultural knowledges. Finally, access barriers in schools need to be critically assessed, rationalized, and redefined at the leadership level to be able to support teachers to incorporate Native cultural content into learning environments for all children.

Settler Innocence

Settler innocence is a process defined by Lees at al. (2021) where the modern-day White population identifies themselves as not responsible for the historical and present colonial structures, therefore, overlooking the violence that it maintains, as well as having no interest in knowing or coming to know about historical and present colonial structures. This theoretical framework provided the structure to support deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions of confidence, preparedness, and efficacy to support Indigenous peoples and cultures in early childhood classrooms in public schools across Osage County. This framework provided a firm structure to allow this study to be situated in a way that allowed for the collection of data that would be the most meaningful to understand in what ways settler innocence exists in public schools across Osage County.

As early childhood teachers expressed willingness to support Native cultural content in their classrooms, they also identified specific limitations preventing them from being able to carry this out in their classrooms, connecting to Theme 1: *Access barriers in schools determine how teachers are able to create learning environments for, about, and with Native children*. These limitations existed in schools where Native partnerships were not present or visible, and teachers tended to remain in a state of recognizing limiting factors but not demonstrating the agency to work against the status quo to enact change. While teachers relied on educational leaders to communicate, model, and provide the resources necessary for teachers to meet expectations, they also deferred to the pedagogy learned from higher education which was found

to be whitestream dominant, which connects to Theme 2: *If teachers are responsible for teaching Native cultures, Indigenous concepts need to be written or explicitly provided for them*. Teachers tended to remain within the status quo of teaching what was comfortable, expected, written, safe, and learned from institutions of higher education. When teachers were unable to unlock intellectual sovereignty by having the correct cultural materials and supports to shift status quo mindsets, settler innocence was perpetuated by teachers not knowing or coming to know about historical or present colonial structures (Lees et al., 2021). However, when educational leaders permitted Native partnerships through access barriers and provided the cultural supports and resources, teachers learned how to incorporate Native cultural content effectively and confidently, which connects to Theme 3: *Teachers can teach whatever they are prepared to teach*.

Social Cognitive Theory and Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as a person's beliefs in their capability to produce a given accomplishment, and fits within Bandura's context of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2012). Just as children model what they see, teachers from this study were found to model what they perceived from their principals and administrators as being important and valued. According to Bandura (2012), self-efficacy is developed through mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and through physical and emotional states. The findings from this study showed that teachers' decision-making processes fluctuated to adjust to meet expectations communicated from their principals and administrators. As teachers mastered how they met expectations and decisions were influenced through social modeling and persuasion, perceptions of efficacy to create learning environments for, about, and with Native children were developed and reinforced.

Self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012) as a framework provided a lens to understand teachers' perceived efficacy to incorporate Native cultural content into their classrooms. Teachers who were better prepared had more positive perceptions of efficacy to support Native children and cultures. For teachers to feel prepared to effectively incorporate and support Native children and cultures, they identified preparation within the educational communities where they live and work. While higher education was found to have stronger impacts on teacher perceptions of *confidence,* professional preparation and support in the professional community was found to have a stronger impact on teacher perceptions of *efficacy* in the classroom.

Bandura's model (2012) provided clarity to understand how teachers develop feelings of efficacy from what is modeled to them socially from their educational leaders and Osage language teachers and tutors. Teachers who had access to the Osage language teachers, tutors, and resources were impacted by how these resources helped them to carry out lessons and activities in the classroom. The teachers were also persuaded socially from within their schools by what types of lessons to teach and expectations to meet, as well as the physical and emotional experiences from teachers to meet the expectations communicated to them from principals and administrators. Finally, teachers' mastery experiences of how successful their lessons or activities were carried out worked to develop teachers' perceptions of efficacy. These components were specifically connected to Theme 1: *Access barriers in schools determine how teachers are able to create learning environments for, about, and with Native children*.

When teachers successfully carried out a lesson or activity, or met a certain expectation or goal, their perception of efficacy was reinforced to continue that behavior. When teachers had a negative experience or experienced frustration carrying out a certain task, perceptions of efficacy were adjusted and realigned. For teachers to feel effective in incorporating and

supporting Native children and cultures, they need to be provided the correct supports, models, and resources to master this expectation, which connects to Theme 2: *If teachers are responsible for teaching Native cultures, Indigenous concepts need to be written or explicitly provided for them*. Further, one of the most significant influences of teacher perceptions of efficacy was to see principals and administrators model how to support and incorporate learning environments for Native children and provide cultural resources and partnerships within the school, which connects to Theme 4: *Native principals and administrators can elevate Native cultural existence in schools from surviving to thriving*. Even when teachers felt confident from higher education to create learning environments for Native children, perceptions of efficacy were directly related to preparedness and modeling of expectations in the professional spaces at school.

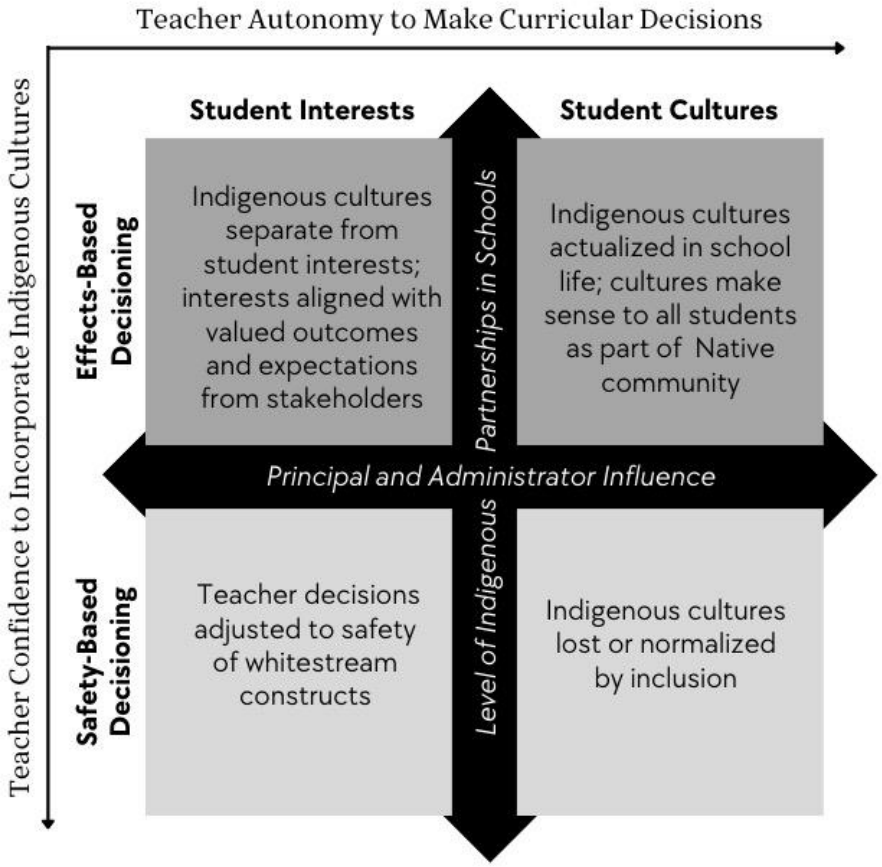
Conceptual Model of Outcomes from Teacher Efficacy and Autonomy

It was found that teacher perceptions of efficacy are closely connected to how confident teachers feel about teaching Native content and their autonomy to make curricular decisions based on student interests and cultures. The matrix below was created to illustrate how teachers' levels of confidence to incorporate Indigenous cultural content and teacher' autonomy to make curricular decisions impact efficacy to support Native cultures at school. The level of Indigenous partnerships in the school and the influence of principals and administrators plays a critical role in teachers' perceptions of confidence to incorporate Native content and autonomy to make curricular decisions based on student cultures. When these partnerships and influences support Native cultural content, teacher confidence and teacher autonomy are also supported, making the effects from incorporating Indigenous cultural content beneficial and relevant to student cultures. As illustrated, when Indigenous partnerships and principal and administrator influences do not support Native cultural content, teacher confidence and teacher autonomy to support student

cultures are lower, and teachers tend to make curricular decisions that are safe and aligned to whitestream constructs, perpetuating settler innocence (Lees, et al., 2021).

Figure 9

Conceptual Model of Outcomes from Teacher Efficacy and Autonomy



Note. This concept map illustrates how teacher confidence to incorporate Indigenous cultures and teacher autonomy to make curricular decisions based on student interests and student cultures work together to create outcomes for children. As described by Bandura (2012), the more teachers experience mastery and are influenced through positive social modeling, social persuasion, and through physical and emotional states, teachers' perceptions of efficacy to support Native children and cultures are reinforced.

Summary of Theoretical Frameworks

This study shows that settler innocence exists in early childhood settings and is perpetuated by the power that principals and administrators hold as determiners of educational priorities. Settler innocence (Lees et al., 2021) as a framework was used a lens to discover that white dominance is present in the pedagogy that develops teachers, as well as in educational systems that maintain teacher development and support at the status quo. Through *Liberating Sovereign Potential* (RedCorn, 2020), the access barriers were determined to be the gateways for Osage Nation partnerships to enter and develop within the schools. When these partnerships were allowed to be in the school, Native cultural content and resources were directly accessible to teachers and children. When principals and administrators prevented or limited Osage teachers and resources to cross access barriers, public school teachers' and students' cultural knowledges were limited, ultimately assimilating to whitestream perspectives. Self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012) provided the lens to understand how early childhood teachers' understanding of appropriate and accurate Native cultural content and histories were restricted by what was provided and modeled to them by their principals and administrators, curriculum, and professional development that were not tailored to their specific student and community demographics. The values that influenced teachers' decision-making processes were reflected through the lessons and activities that teachers choose to incorporate in their learning environments. Findings show that Native cultures would have the opportunity to flourish in, with, and through schools with the right types of partnerships that are allowed in schools.

The table below provides a comparison of the theoretical frameworks that were used in this study. *Liberating Sovereign Potential* (RedCorn, 2020) provide the support to situate this study in an Osage-centric context. Settler innocence (Less et al., 2021) provided the lens to

recognize and identify how, if, or in what ways settler innocence is present in public schools in Native communities, and perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012) provided the lens to understand how perceptions of self are developed and reinforced. These frameworks worked together to understand a phenomenon in early childhood public schools specific to Osage communities that has not been previously studied by social researchers.

Table 13

Comparison of Theoretical Frameworks Used

	Teacher Decision-Making Processes	**Teacher Perceptions of Confidence**	**Teacher Perceptions of Preparedness to be Effective**
Liberating Sovereign Potential	Native cultural content was incorporated into learning environments by both Native and non-Native teachers with support from Osage partnerships. This is notable that Native *and* non-Native teachers could incorporate Indigenous cultural content with support from Osage language teachers and tutors. Since the Osage language teachers and tutors who work with classroom teachers recognize what teachers lack or need, allowing access to Osage language teachers and tutors to be involved in school-wide professional develop and trainings would be beneficial for the teachers and children, and connects to Theme 3: *Teachers can teach whatever they are prepared to teach*.	The macro-level influenced the meso-level of influence, and the culminated influences from macro and meso-levels influenced the micro-level within the schools. Institutions of higher education, policies, Osage Nation, and Osage communities located at the macro-level of influence impacted the meso-level, which were principals and administrators. From the meso-level, the influences from principals and administrators directly impacted the micro-level, which were the teachers and children where early childhood development takes place. This connects to Theme 4: *Native principals and administrators can elevate Native cultural existence in schools from surviving to thriving*.	Teachers identified needing professional development and trainings that specifically focus on ways the school and early learning environments are structured and designed to be able to receive Native American children. Teachers need time to learn and teach Native concepts, and schools need to invite Native guest speakers, Elders, dancers, and families into the classroom as co-teachers of cultural knowledges. Access barriers in schools need to be critically assessed, rationalized, and redefined at the leadership level to be able to support teachers to incorporate Native cultural content into learning environments for all children. This connects to Theme 1: *Access barriers in schools determine how teachers are able to create learning environments for,*

			about, and with Native children.
Settler Innocence	Teachers believed that if they were not Native American, they did not have the fundamental knowledges necessary to teach children about Native cultures, especially to Native children. While seeing oneself as capable and responsible to teach Native American concepts through reflection and evaluation is a step toward critical consciousness, believing that they cannot teach it because they are not Native American themselves alleviates their responsibility and perpetuates white dominance. Settler innocence is modeled to children by how their cultures are reflected at school and connects to Theme 4: *Native principals and administrators can elevate Native cultural existence in schools from surviving to thriving.*	The power of leaders within educational systems influenced teachers' agency to question or change the status quo within schools. Teacher discourse included, "I want to, *but*," showing that teachers are willing but not confident in themselves to teach Native cultures or ask for support. The discrepancy lies in the space between teachers not *knowing* how to teach Native cultural content and not having the *agency*, or influence, to seek access of Native cultural content and resources. Settler innocence manifests through white dominance in pedagogical support from school and institutions of higher education and connects to Theme 3: *Teachers can teach whatever they are prepared to teach.*	For teachers who rely on curriculum, lessons, and explicit concepts that can be documented for curriculum mapping and confirmation of content taught, teaching concepts that are ambiguous without support will limit the opportunity for teachers coming to know about Native cultural knowledge. Educational leaders can dismantle whitestream dominance by developing partnerships with Native nations that can provide cultural support, resources, and professional development to teach classroom teachers. This connects to Theme 2: *If teachers are responsible for teaching Native cultures, Indigenous concepts need to be written or explicitly provided for them.*
Perceived Self-Efficacy	Teachers' decision-making processes fluctuated to adjust to meet expectations communicated from their principals and administrators. Decision-making was influenced by teachers' mastery of expectations, social modeling and persuasion from others, and their own perceptions of how well they incorporated Native cultural content into their learning environments. This connects to Theme 1: *Access barriers in schools*	Teachers stated they were willing to teach Native cultural content but needed more support and resources to be able to carry this out in their classrooms. Teachers with lower confidence said they have never taught Native-specific content or lessons before, showing that teachers prefer teaching what is familiar to them. This connects to Theme 2: *If teachers are responsible for teaching Native cultures, Indigenous*	The teachers who were most effective in recognizing and incorporating Native cultural content in their classrooms had access to cultural resources, including active, visible partnerships with the Osage Nation. Even when teachers did not identify themselves as proficiently understanding Native knowledges, they were able to identify the Osage Nation as a source of knowledge and

	determine how teachers are able to create learning environments for, about, and with Native children.	*concepts need to be written or explicitly provided for them.*	information, connecting to Theme 4: *Native principals and administrators can elevate Native cultural existence in schools from surviving to thriving*.

Note. This table provides a side-by-side comparison of how each theoretical framework provided a specific lens to approach data collection and analysis. *Liberating Sovereign Potential* (RedCorn, 2020) provided a model for assessing the educational landscape and identifying the community assets that influence the education in Native communities. Settler innocence (Lees et al., 2021) provided a critical lens to identify settler innocence and how it affects teachers through internal and external influences, and through pedagogy learned from institutions of higher education that are whitestream dominant.

Analysis of Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations Used

It is appropriate to provide a brief analysis of the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. It was assumed pre-existing connections with teachers through professional, social, or cultural contexts could impact teachers' willingness to participate in this study. While not the case with every participant, some teachers who knew me through social contexts were more willing to have an open discussion than teachers who knew me only through professional contexts. It was also found that regardless of any pre-existing connections, some teachers who agreed to be contacted for an interview did not respond for scheduling once the informed consent was provided to them. If these participants were Native American, it could be possible that they were less willing to participate if they were recorded or thought their cultures were being used for research. More Native American teachers participated in the questionnaire than the semi-structured interviews. This notion was presented to my Osage Advisory Committee, who

confirmed that historical trauma from the violent forced removals and colonization of Native Americans is still a very real part of our Native culture.

Additionally, it was assumed from the beginning of this study that teacher participants could likely include teachers with emergency certifications or nontraditional teaching licensures. While all the teachers participating in the semi-structured interviews had traditional teacher certifications and licensures, it was not completely clear if any participants from the questionnaire had emergency certificates or nontraditional teaching licensures. Since the questionnaire questions were not required to be answered, there were responses that were not filled in to describe the type of teaching program or certificate that was obtained.

The anticipated limitations for this study were identified as limited internet connectivity and the time of the school year that this study took place. Technology barriers as a whole did not pose observable limitations and all teacher participants seemed to have access to laptops, cell phones, and wi-fi to meet virtually. The connectivity of the internet across the county was unstable at times, but using my personal hotspot proved helpful when the internet connection was uncooperative. The timing of the study, however, did prove to be a challenge. I obtained IRB approval in mid-March, but to be culturally respectful of the Osage Nation, I contacted the Osage Historic Preservation Office, which facilitates conversations with the Cultural Advisory Board for IRB approval. It was critical to take this additional step to see if an IRB needed to be obtained from the Osage Nation since Osage-specific data was planned to be gathered through data collection methods, although from a public school perspective. While this additional layer of cultural respect and ethical consideration was necessary, data collection was delayed one month which pushed the timing of this study into May as teachers were preparing for summer

break. While the timing could have limited the number of teachers willing to participate in this study, it is not fully known if this impacted individual teacher response.

Nevertheless, summer break did prove to be a major barrier to schedule small groups of early childhood teachers able to meet for focus groups. With teachers leaving the school buildings for the summer, trying to schedule convenient meeting times where three or more teachers could meet for a focus group proved to be impractical. The purpose of the focus groups was to better understand the lesson planning processes, influences when making decisions regarding curriculum and creating learning environments, preparedness from school and higher education to teach in rural school districts, effects of student demographics on curricular decision-making, and experiences that the teachers could share to gather deeper understanding of their perceptions. Because the small focus groups of classroom teachers were unable to be scheduled, I intentionally met with additional individual teachers representing different areas of the county to understand these specific questions. During these individual interviews, I purposefully framed questions in way to evoke whole group thinking from the teachers. I asked teachers to describe what a lesson planning session looked like for them, the roles of the teachers in lesson planning, and to tell me more about the dynamics of their meetings when working with their grade level coworkers.

The delimitations for this study were site selections of the schools, which included the 13 public schools having a Johnson O'Malley designation, or Osage County school districts. This delimitation allowed Skiatook Public Schools to be included in this study because of their Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM designation even though not an Osage County school district, as well as Avant Public Schools, which does not have an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM designation but is an Osage County school district. Additionally, the delimitations filtered out the

public schools that were located in Osage County but were not Osage County districts and not relevant to the Osage-specific context for this study. The Osage Advisory Committee provided contextual insight about Avant public schools not having designation as an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school, stemming from inaccurate data reporting by the school district several years prior. The Osage Advisory Committee confirmed that including Avant in this study was beneficial since the school district serves Native American children and engages in reciprocal efforts with the Osage Nation to partner for resources and collaborative opportunities as they work to reobtain JOM designation in the future.

An analysis of the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations within the study was important to acknowledge to show transparency and ethical rigor taken for this research. These assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were part of this qualitative research study and were recognized to approach this study in ways that would allow for deeper understanding of the research questions for this study.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study are significant to the contribution of educational sovereignty for Native children in public school systems. This study was uniquely situated within a specific context and time to understand an Indigenous cultural and educational phenomenon that has not been previously explored by other social researchers. Further, a conceptual model was developed from the findings of this study, that can be used to further the educational sovereignty of Native children in public schools. The following section will redefine how the findings from this study can impact the field of early childhood education.

Rethinking Early Childhood Education in Rural, Native Communities

Principals and administrators are in influential positions across Osage County schools to determine how teachers and children view Native American cultures, histories, and peoples. Educational leaders who communicate and model support of Native partnerships within their schools would alleviate many of the limitations preventing public school teachers from making decisions to incorporate Native cultural content in their early learning environments. This would also be a step toward recentering the school's educational connectedness to each Native community. This step forward would relieve the uncertainty for teachers not knowing who is responsible to teach Native cultures to students, and recenter teacher mindsets to realize that regardless of their own ethnicities, they are capable of learning about Native American cultures and qualified to impart that knowledge to their students. Further, the reality is that there is a significant population of Native American children in these communities who are not taught about their own cultural histories and values. The opportunity for educational leaders to allow access to Osage partnerships would be monumental in shifting mindsets for all children to understand Native American cultures and peoples accurately and respectfully.

Further, settler innocence is maintained in public school when teachers identify limitations but lack the agency to make decisions to enact change. This discrepancy is perpetuated by educational systems that primarily offer whitestream curricula and devote instructional learning time to academic concepts that are aligned to preparing students for college and career readiness in a colonized American society. The figured world that teachers come to school knowing is that there is a hierarchy of power, and principals and administrators hold power and influence over classroom teachers. When it comes to questioning curriculum, Native cultural content, scheduling, Osage partnerships, or other limitations preventing teachers from

feeling confident or prepared to effectively incorporate Native cultural content, teachers lack the agency to question the systems of power and change the status quo. This suppression on early childhood teachers from principals and administrators, either perceived or real, encourages settler innocence in public schools by preventing teachers from coming to know about Native cultures, as well as teachers relying on white dominant ways of thinking, which is what is familiar to teachers.

Teachers expressed understanding that helping children see their own cultures in school is in the best interest of their students, *but* they need the correct materials, resources, and supports. This gap between willingness and action creates a unique opportunity for educational leaders in the public schools to develop partnerships with the Osage Nation to provide support for the classroom teachers, which moves education in the direction toward educational sovereignty. Teachers teaching ambiguous Indigenous cultural concepts and knowledges limit early childhood teachers from coming to know about Native cultural knowledges. Since Native American cultures and histories are traditionally taught and passed down to children orally by families and elders, the most skilled and knowledgeable educators within the community were identified as the Native students, families, and Osage language teachers and tutors, and Native principals. The concept of students as teachers has the opportunity to bring Native cultures accurately and respectfully to the forefront of Indigenous conversations in the public school classrooms. For teachers needing Native cultural content to be explicitly provided, drawing upon the knowledges of the Osage language teachers and tutors that are already part of the community and school would be the most constructive and beneficial way to effectively incorporate Native cultural content. The role of the public school educational leaders is to permit Native parents, families, and Osage language teachers and tutors into the school and establish healthy

relationships to benefit all children, and to provide the appropriate materials, supports, and communication that models prioritized value of Native American cultures and peoples.

Conceptual Model of Understanding

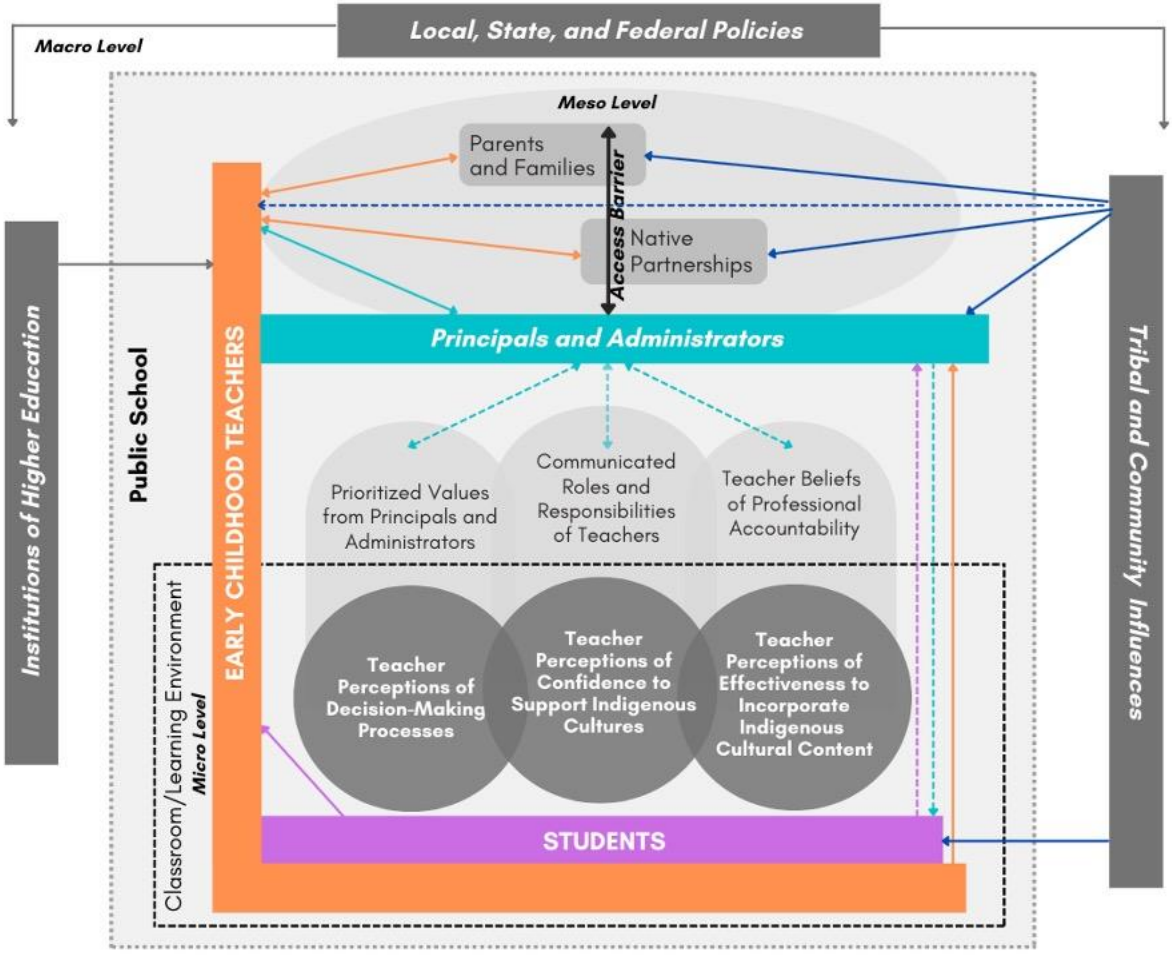
This conceptual model illustrates findings from this study, and the purpose of this model is to demonstrate the explicit and implicit influences that impact public schools in rural, Native communities. The focus of this conceptual model is the culmination of influences that filter into the meso-level of influence where principals and administrators have the power to influence early childhood teachers. The solid arrows indicate explicit influences, such as written and spoken words communicated to classroom teachers. The dotted lines indicate implicit influences, such as what is communicated to classroom teachers through daily schedules, how time is allocated at school, and the types of curricular resources provided to teachers. The public school and classroom/early learning environments are permeable and adaptable to internal and external influences from the community and systems within the school districts.

At the meso-level, the access barrier runs directly through parents and families and Indigenous partnerships, showing that while explicit influences exist, the ways principals and administrators limit or permit these partnerships determines the types of resources and contributions these partnerships have with teachers. Even when teachers have access to partnerships with parents, families, and Native language teachers and tutors, it is ultimately the internal leadership of the schools that limit or permit these partnerships to exist within the school. The way these partnerships are communicated to teachers by principals and administrators influence early childhood teachers' decision-making processes that impact confidence and efficacy to incorporate Indigenous cultural content in learning environments.

Multiple influences impact teachers in both explicit and implicit ways, but the strongest influences are the prioritized values, attitudes of responsibility, and beliefs of accountability that are communicated to the teachers from their principals and administrators. These influences are illustrated in the conceptual model below, which develop teachers' perceptions of decision-making processes, confidence, and efficacy to incorporate Indigenous cultural content into early learning environments.

Figure 10

Conceptual Model of Explicit and Implicit Influences that Create Access Barriers



Note. This concept map shows how the external influences and internal influences impacting early childhood teachers, and where the access barriers exist in public schools.

Significance of the Study Within Public Schools

At the public school leadership level, findings from this study can be shared with building leaders to demonstrate what teachers come to school knowing, what teachers identify as limitations, and how principals and administrators can provide the appropriate supports and pathways needed for teachers to incorporate Native cultural content effectively and confidently into their learning environments. Ideally, this study can bring the concept of access barriers to the forefront of leadership conversations when making decisions about curricular resources, Native partnerships, and professional development and training content. This could be especially valuable to rural schools, where challenges already exist to obtain access professional development that is affordable and efficiently meets the needs of the teachers and staff (Johnson, J. et al., 2018). Professional development content that models to teachers how to respectfully interact with Native families, how to recognize subtle mannerisms from Native children who prefer to stay with families, for example, so learning is optimized could be worthwhile professional development content that connects relevancy of Native cultures to curriculum. Other recommendations are for educational leaders and teachers to engage in meaningful home visits with families to gain a deeper understanding of the knowledges and experiences that Native children bring with them to school each day. This experience would be helpful for educational leaders and teachers to be able to make connections in authentic ways with Native families, as well as build trust between school and families as partners in the educational experiences for Native children.

The information from this study can be shared at the teacher level to stimulate thinking and awareness around the concept of settler innocence. While teachers' willingness to support Native cultures, children, and families was prevalent within this study, findings still showed

leaders not willing or able to provide the correct pathways for teachers to carry this out in their classrooms, which only perpetuate Eurocentric inaccuracies about Indigenous peoples and cultures. By creating time and space for teachers and educational leaders to engage in meaningful conversations, collaborative spaces can be used to constructively assess and identify resources specific to each school and Native community to support Native children and cultures in their classrooms. Within each Native community, cultural resources and people having knowledge of the towns, Osage culture and history, Osage language, and Osage stories can be identified as relevant resources to extend Native knowledges from the community into the classrooms. Engaging with Native Elders, speakers, dancers, family members, and tribal employees also creates opportunities to bring guests into the classroom as co-teachers of culture.

Moreover, the information from this study can be shared with the Osage Nation to support the educational goals outlined in the Osage Nation strategic plan (Osage Nation, 2007; 2018; 2020) and can work to de-settle and recenter critical consciousness in ways that reinforce educational sovereignty. The Osage Nation can use this information to engage in more meaningful and authentic discussions with schools to determine the most impactful ways to collaborate, provide resources, and improve partnerships within the schools. As Osage education leaders meet with school administrators for mandatory consultations, the information from this study could prove beneficial for Osage educational leaders to recognize that access barriers in schools often limit the information offered during these consultations. This could provide an entry point for the Osage Nation to be visible to teachers during professional development and trainings, as well as other relevant meetings or collaborations where the voices of Native children need to be heard.

Additional opportunities for the Osage Nation and public school collaborations include the Osage Nation providing after school cultural classes for children already at the public schools. These rural communities have limited opportunities for childcare and knowing that the Osage Nation has interest in revitalizing Osage language and culture, identifying schools as the heartbeat within these rural communities would be an opportunity for partnership between the schools and the Osage Nation. This partnership could strengthen Native culture and language in communities across Osage County, and since findings from this study show that teachers are limited on time and resources, a collaboration with schools could prove beneficial to teachers and educational leaders, as well. If Native nations are able to utilize the physical educational spaces already in place in rural communities and provide their own teachers, unlocking intellectual and educational sovereignty could have an opportunity to be actualized in the communities. Teaching Osage language and cultural content to children in spaces where settler innocence exists would be an opportunity to develop cultural knowledges among children and unlock Native awareness and knowledges. This study could be used to show a need for tribal partnerships with the school to provide childcare housed in rural public schools that embeds Native culture, language, and orthography for all children.

Finally, findings from this study could be used to advocate for policies and policy change, particularly regarding policies pertaining to cultures and diversity, and teacher evaluation requirements. The policy from HB-1775 has created much ambiguity and limitations for schools and teachers regarding how cultures and diversity are taught and presented to students, as well as the content provided through professional development for teachers. The Osage Nation Congress' recent passing of a resolution asking Oklahoma legislators to fully repeal HB-1775 (Polacca, 2022) shows Native nations as invested in public education for their

Osage people. A statement from Congresswoman Whitney RedCorn demonstrates the urgency for systems of power to desettle Eurocentric policies by saying,

> When we fail to feel the weight of history, we risk repeating it, but we learn it to grow from it. We seek to preserve and perpetuate a full and abundant way of life and we as Osages seek to leave this world as better than we found it. Our history as Osage people is rich and is worthy of teaching, as is the history of our neighboring nations and peoples (Polacca, 2022).

When policies limit how cultures are acknowledged in the classroom, along with policies like HB-2957, which outlines the domains and dimensions expected of teachers for evaluation but does not specifically address student cultures, teachers' ability to teach about cultures becomes more difficult. These difficulties are further compounded in rural areas.

Since teachers are limited in how and what they can teach about cultures and diversity, the information from this study can be used to advocate for policies and policy change by showing how effective Native partnerships within schools can benefit all students by teaching accurate and respectful Native contexts separate from Eurocentric outlooks.

Recommendations for Future Research

Opportunities for future research were identified as themes emerged from this study, along with recommendations from the Osage Advisory Committee. Potential research opportunities were identified to include: a community based qualitative research study focused on Native American education public schools for each Native community, qualitative research about settler innocence in early childhood public schools but from the perspectives of the Osage Nation, qualitative research about settler innocence in early childhood public schools but specific to principals and administrators across Osage County schools, a follow up questionnaire related

to this study, a qualitative study on mandatory consultations between Native nations and public schools and how these consultations impact or influence decision-making at the leadership level in Oklahoma schools, and qualitative research to understand how children attending the Osage Immersion School integrate into public high schools.

A community based qualitative research project with individual communities in Osage County would provide an opportunity to understand Native cultures in public school education from a community perspective. Being able to gain a deeper understanding of what each community identifies as needs, suggestions, and hopes for the future regarding the education of the children specific to each community would be an opportunity to better support Native cultures in public schools. A community based qualitative research project of this capacity would be an opportunity to broaden perspectives that may not have been represented from this focused revelatory case study. A community based qualitative research study that also incorporates insurgent research could also identify partnerships and resources that are distinctly tailored for each Native community.

A recommendation made by the Osage Advisory Committee is to contact the Osage Nation Historic Preservation office for Osage IRB approval to engage in research that seeks to better understand settler innocence in early childhood public schools from the perspectives of the Osage Nation. This opportunity would be valuable to gain the perspectives of the Osage Nation to strengthen the partnerships and support for the education of Native children in public schools. Findings could be compared to the findings from this study to identify the most appropriate and meaningful approaches to support educational sovereignty and critical consciousness across Osage County public schools.

Additionally, a qualitative research study about settler innocence in public schools from the perspectives of principals and administrators, middle schools, and secondary schools would provide specific insight to better understand perspectives at the leadership levels regarding Native cultural content in early childhood education in public schools. This opportunity would provide valuable insight into how access barriers are developed and identify potential opportunities that could strengthen and offer support for principals and administrators to feel more comfortable and safer to incorporate Native cultural content in schools. Access barriers could be in place for certain reasons due to policies or limitations out of the principals' and administrators' control, and a study specific to their perspectives would allow for deeper exploration to understand the needs and supports specific to educational leadership in rural, Native communities.

A follow-up questionnaire related to this study would be useful to gain deeper insight into what participants originally reported, and any changes in teachers' decision-making processes, perceptions of confidence to create learning environments to reflect Native cultures in the classroom, and perceptions of efficacy to incorporate Native cultural content in the classroom. This could prove useful to better understand gaps in resources and ways to better support early childhood teachers in public schools.

A qualitative study on mandatory consultations between Native nations and public schools could identify the ways these consultations impact or influence decision-making at the leadership level in Oklahoma schools. Since mandatory consultations are a fairly recent requirement from the Oklahoma State Department of Education, this could be an opportunity to study a phenomenon in public education that has not been researched before. A study focused on the implications of mandatory consultations could identify what is going well, what is not

working, and what can be done differently or added to improve public education in Native communities.

Moreover, the opportunity exists for research specific to the Osage Immersion School to understand how the students integrate into the local public school systems in high school. A qualitative study of this nature would provide the opportunity to be able to understand and identify specific ways the immersion school and public school develops and prepares children academically and culturally. The findings would be able to reveal how students, families, teachers, and stakeholders can better support the immersion school efforts to successfully prepare children to be culturally and academically prepared for success upon entering public high school, as well as ways the public schools can be better prepared to receive students entering public school from the Immersion School.

Conclusion

This revelatory case study provides a significant contribution to deepen understanding about how Native American children and cultures are supported in early childhood classrooms in public schools, as well as the ways early childhood educators can create learning environments that are designed to receive Native American children in public school. The research from this study was purposefully designed to understand in what ways early childhood teachers in public schools in rural, Native communities create learning environments for, about, and with Native American children. The major themes that emerged from what teachers communicated throughout this study can be used to inform future research, and to inform educational leaders in hopes that their own internal systems can be evaluated and redefined to support Native partnerships for the benefit of all children. The ways school leaders interpreted and communicated policies to teachers affects how Native American students experience public

school education. The information from this study could be paramount in working to change how these policies impact Native American students. The access barriers identified show the need for Native nations to assist principals and administrators in communicating how Native-specific content and resources can be accessed and provided within the schools.

As I sat down to help my son write his story, I asked him how he thought the story should go. I knew what I wanted to write about him having to "pretend" to be an Indian, but I was curious about what his eight-year-old mind was thinking; after all, it was his assignment. As I looked into his blue Osage eyes, I could not help but to see my nine-year-old self sitting at the kitchen table, blinking away tears while trying to explain to my mom and dad, "I erased what I am on that test because my teacher told me to." I quickly squeezed my eyes, making those memories go away.

I looked at my son again…it was like it was happening all over again. So much has changed in education since I was my son's age, but how is this still happening? Would his teacher had given him this assignment if he had darker eyes, darker hair, and darker skin; if he looked like how whitestream curriculum depicts Native Americans? Would she had given him this assignment if she was taught differently by the educational system?

I could feel generations of my family's oppression swell with each heartbeat as I calmly waited for my son to answer. I glanced at him, then at my daughter working on homework and listening to music in her room. As I looked down at my own hands, I realized that I am here because of the strength, knowledge, and determination from my ancestors who survived the attempts from those who tried to erase us. My son, my daughter, they are here because they are

descendants of our family who persevered and held knowledges that protected them from being erased. They refused to be erased.

"Did you hear me, mom?"

I looked at my son, who was giggling because he knew he made me jump out of my thoughts.

"I said, did you hear me, mom?" he repeated.

I quickly responded, "Yes, let's hear it!" I was ready. I knew he had the answer.

Come on buddy…I've taught you…don't give in…you're here for a reason…

I heard his little voice confidently say, "I just have to draw a picture of what I look like right now and write about the truth."

I asked him if he was alright with that since he wasn't "pretending." I know his response made his ancestors as proud as me.

"Oh yeah! I just need to show my teacher what's real," and as he giggled and started writing, he said,

"It might take a lot of work."

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Appendix A - IRB Approval Letter

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | University Research Compliance Office

TO: Alex Red Corn
Educational Leadership
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number IRB-11108

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 03/15/2022

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Exploring Settler Innocence Among Early Childhood Educators in the Osage Community: A Case Study."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 03/15/2022

EXPIRATION DATE: 03/14/2025

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

No more than minimal risk to subjects

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Electronically signed by Rick Scheidt on 03/15/2022 11:36 AM ET

203 Fairchild Hall, Manhattan, KS 66502 | (785) 532-3224 | fax: (785) 532-3278

Appendix B - Informed Consent Form

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring Settler Innocence in the Osage Community: A Case Study

PROJECT APPROVAL DATE: March 15, 2022

EXPIRATION DATE: March 14, 2025

LENGTH OF STUDY: 12 months

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Alex RedCorn, Ed.D., Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership, Educational Leadership Department

CO-INVESTIGATOR: Joni Hall, Doctoral dissertation research

CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Dr. Alex RedCorn, Ed.D., aRedCorn@k-state.edu,

IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION:

- Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas 66506, (785) 532-3224
- Cheryl Doerr, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas 66506, (785) 532-3224

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of this study is to explore the curricular decision-making process of early childhood teachers (ECE; pre-K-3rd grade) when constructing learning environments related to Indigenous peoples and cultures in selected schools in Osage County, Oklahoma.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: This revelatory as a case study will use semi-structured interviews, focus groups, document collection, and questionnaires.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED: There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: It is anticipated that the benefits from this study include identification of perceptions that exist and identify any areas that need attention to create a more solid educational foundation for students.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: All data collected during this study will be held at the researcher's office and will only be available to the researcher. Data stored on the computer is only accessible to the researcher through password protection. Data stored in hard copy will be stored in a locked cabinet, which is only accessible by the researcher. All data will be reviewed to make sure it cannot be used to identify you in any way. After all identifiable private information has been removed the information could be used for future research studies or

distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS? No

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time and stop participating at any time without explanation or penalty.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT NAME: _____ DATE:_____

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE: _____DATE:_____

WITNESS TO SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____
(PROJECT STAFF)

Appendix C - Phone/Email Solicitation

Early Childhood Education Teachers,

My name is Joni Hall and I am a doctoral student at Kansas State University studying Educational Leadership. I am developing a study to learn about the curricular decision-making processes of early childhood teachers (ECE; pre-K – third grade) when constructing learning environments related to Indigenous peoples and cultures. As an Osage citizen with experience teaching early childhood education, I know you are in a perfect position within your capacity to help me understand more about your knowledge related to perceptions of Indigenous culture in the classroom. For this study, I am looking to meet with you in person or virtually for an interview. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you are interested in participating, please contact me at jonihall@k-state.edu or (918) 951-0416. I look forward to talking with you further. I appreciate your time.

Sincerely,

Joni Hall

Kansas State University

Appendix D - Questionnaire Guide

A questionnaire was used to gather data from the teachers teaching in Osage County public schools. The questionnaire was designed in Qualtrics and sent via email using the email list found on the public school websites and on the Oklahoma State Department of Education website. The questionnaire was designed with a combination of closed and open-ended questions.

1. Do you currently teach, or have experience teaching pre-K through third grade?
2. What grade level do you teach, or have experience teaching?
3. How many years have you been teaching (as of the end of the 2021-2022 academic school year)?
4. How many years of experience do you have teaching pre-K through third grade?
5. Do you have tribal citizenship or any tribal affiliation?
6. If yes, what tribes?
7. Please indicate any educator training degrees that you have earned, and from what college/university you received that degree (insert in text box).
8. Have you taken any higher education courses specific to Native American histories or cultures?
9. In what ways did your courses or college/universities prepare you to support Native American cultures in the classroom?
10. How would you rate your effectiveness in teaching Native American lessons or activities?
11. Please describe why you chose your level of effectiveness in the above question.

12. How would you rate your confidence in creating learning environments that reflect Native American cultures?
13. Please describe why you chose your level of confidence in the above question.
14. What types of resources or supports would help you feel more confident and/or effective in teaching Native American lessons or activities?
15. What, if any, are the limitations that influence your ability to teach Native American lessons or activities?
16. To what extent do mandated district or state level tests influence your lesson planning decisions on topics related to Indigenous peoples and cultures?
17. Please share any comments about how mandated testing at the district or state level influences your ability to teach Native American themed topics.
18. I have the autonomy/power to choose my own lessons/activities based on my students' interests. (rate)
19. I have the autonomy/power to choose my own lessons/activities based on my students' cultures. (rate)
20. Are you aware of the Native American lessons on the Oklahoma State Department of Education website?
21. If yes, how do you use the Native American lessons from the Oklahoma State Department of Education website in your classroom?
22. If yes, how confident are you in using the lessons from the Oklahoma State Department of Education website in your classroom?
23. Are you aware of the Osage lessons on the Osage Nation website?
24. If yes, how do you use the Osage Nation lessons in your classroom?

25. If yes, how confident are you in using the Osage Nation lessons in your classroom?
26. Has the presence of the Osage Nation in your community influenced how you construct your lessons or learning environments?
27. Can you explain why or why not?
28. Has the Osage Nation Education Department, Osage Nation Language Department, or Osage Nation/Wahzhazhe Cultural Center ever influenced how you construct your lessons?
29. Can you explain why or why not?
30. Is there anything else you would like to share related to teaching Native American topics, or teaching Native American children in your classroom?
31. If you teach pre-K through third grade, or have experience teaching pre-K through third grade, would you be willing to participate in an individual interview on these topics? If so, please click the link at the end of this survey so I can collect your contact information. Thank you!

Appendix E - Semi-Structured Interview Guide

This interview guide was used during semi-structured interviews with participants for this study. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. The questions were used to guide the interviews but remained flexible to move where the participant guided the conversation. These questions helped guide the semi-structed interviews.

Participants

Early childhood (pre-K through third grade) teachers teaching in selected public schools in Osage County, Oklahoma

Introduction and Consent

Thank you for taking your time to meet today, and for your willingness to complete the consent form. Your participation and contribution to this study is greatly appreciated, and I am looking forward to learning from you. Our meeting today is scheduled for one hour, and I have prepared some questions to guide our discussion. I hope for this discussion to be an opportunity to gather honest insight from you. Thank you again for your willingness to meet with me today.

I will be recording this meeting on Zoom so I can transcribe the conversation and be able to refer to the video to ensure the context of the conversation. The recorded Zoom files and any documents collected will be stored on a password protected computer and deleted after three years. No identifiable information will be used in the transcriptions of this meeting, and your identity will remain confidential. The data collected from this interview will be used for analysis as part of my dissertation with Kansas State University. You may withdraw at any time with no repercussions or penalty. The findings from this study may be used for other publications, but any identifiable information related to the participant will not be used. Before proceeding with

the interview, do you consent that you understand that the information you share will remain confidential and used for dissertation research?

Interview Guide Related to Teacher Perceptions

1. What is your work title and the name of the school/institution for which you work?
2. Tell me about any professional development or trainings specific to Indigenous peoples and cultures that have prepared you for your job as an early childhood educator in your community.
3. Walk me through a lesson that incorporates Indigenous cultures.
4. Walk me through a typical day in your classroom.
5. What motivates you to incorporate Indigenous cultures in your classroom and lessons?
6. Tell me about your comfort level in trying to incorporate Osage specific content.
7. What do you believe is important for others to know Native children and families in your classroom?
8. Tell me about any barriers that limit additional training and knowledge about culture in the classroom?

Debriefing Statement

As the interview comes to an end, please remember that this data will be analyzed as part of my dissertation study through Kansas State University. Your identity and any identifiable information will remain confidential and removed from the transcript. The recording and any documents collected from this interview will be stored on a password protected computer and deleted after three years. You may withdraw from this study at any time with no repercussions or penalty. While the findings from this study may be used in later publications, any identifiable information from the participant will be removed. I will contact you via email to give you the

opportunity to review preliminary findings to ensure the accuracy of your words and information collected from this interview. Thank you again for taking your time to meet with me today.

Appendix F - Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Participants

3-5 early childhood teachers

Introduction and Consent

Thank you for taking your time to meet today, and for your willingness to complete the consent form. You have been invited because of your role as a classroom teacher or experience teaching pre-K through 3rd grade in an Osage County School or an Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site school. Your participation and contribution to this study is greatly appreciated, and I am looking forward to learning from you. Our meeting today is scheduled for one hour, and I have prepared some questions to guide our discussion. I hope for this discussion to be an opportunity to gather honest insight, and please remember there are no right or wrong answers.

I will be recording this meeting on Zoom so I can transcribe the conversation and be able to refer to the video to ensure the context of the conversation. The recorded Zoom files and any documents collected will be stored on a password protected computer and deleted after three years. No identifiable information will be used in the transcriptions of this meeting, and participant identities will remain confidential. The data collected will be used for analysis as part of my dissertation with Kansas State University. Participants may withdraw at any time with no repercussions or penalty. The findings from this study may be used for other publications, but any identifiable information related to the participants will not be used. Before proceeding with the interview, do you consent that you understand that the information you share will remain confidential and used for dissertation research?

Interview Guide Related to Decision-Making

1. What influences your decision-making when it comes to curriculum?

2. What influences your decision-making for creating learning environments?
3. Where do you get new information about cultural lessons or activities?
4. How has your education or professional development prepared you to teach in a rural district?
5. How has your education or professional development prepared you to teach in a district serving a high Native population?
6. Thinking about the significance of Osage culture, how does this affect lessons or activities in the classroom?
7. How does student demographics affect your curricular decision-making?
8. How do you and your grade level team approach lesson planning?
9. Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important to you?

Debriefing Statement

As our meeting comes to an end, please remember that this data will be analyzed as part of my dissertation study through Kansas State University. Your identity and any identifiable information will remain confidential and removed from the transcripts. The recording and any documents collected from this meeting will be stored on a password protected computer and deleted after three years. You may withdraw from this study at any time with no repercussions or penalty. While the findings from this study may be used in later publications, any identifiable information from the participants will be removed. I will contact you via email to give you the opportunity to review preliminary findings to ensure the accuracy of your words and information collected from this focus group. Thank you again for taking your time to participate in this interview.

Appendix G - Debriefing Statement

Participants,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study focusing on the curricular decision-making processes of early childhood teachers when constructing learning environments related to Indigenous peoples and cultures. This study consisted of interviews, document collection, and questionnaires from early childhood teachers teaching in Osage County schools and/or Osage Reservation/Osage County JOM site schools. The data collected from this study will help to understand the perceptions of confidence and preparedness to create learning environments about, with, and for Indigenous peoples and cultures.

Your participation in this study remains entirely confidential and your personal information will not be released or used in the final documents. The final data will be available for your review after December 31, 2022. If you are interested in seeing the final product, please contact the researcher jonihall@k-state.edu or (918) 951-0416. If you have questions or comments and would like to speak to someone other than the researcher, please contact Dr. Alex RedCorn at aredcorn@k-state.edu.

Again, your participation in this study is appreciated. Your participation has furthered my knowledge related to teacher perceptions of confidence and preparedness in teaching Indigenous culture. Thank you for your time and effort.

Sincerely,

Joni Hall

Kansas State University