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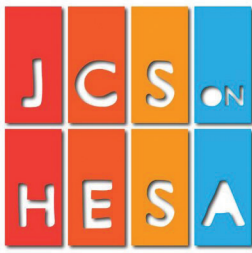
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Unsettling Colonial Structures in Education through Community-Centered Practice

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— Abstract —

In the context of settler colonialism in the US, mainstream education practices function as ongoing enactors of colonial processes. Decolonizing pedagogy seeks to challenge these dominant practices by centering place, Indigenous epistemologies, and rehumanizing values. In this paper, we discuss how faculty and students used community-based experiential learning projects (CBEL) to challenge these dominant and normative educational structures. By integrating an anti-racist and anti-colonial lens, CBEL projects themselves can work to dismantle power structures, build community, and promote experiential learning in a variety of educational spaces. The student projects presented here seek to unsettle colonial educational frameworks of white supremacy and white privilege by promoting counter-hegemonic critical thinking skills and incorporating culturally sustaining work with college faculty/students, outdoor educators, K-12 teacher preparation, and Indigenous communities.

Keywords: decolonizing pedagogy, experiential learning, settler colonialism, race, higher education

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Educational practices and systems in the United States are deeply rooted in settler-colonial frameworks that eradicate cultures, identities, and histories of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and assert nationalistic narratives steeped in white supremacy. Cemented in assimilationist laws and practices mainstreamed within schools, curriculumized racism, school-to-prison pipelines, and othering narratives that marginalize the contributions and identities of BIPOC, schooling in the United States has an enduring tradition of perpetuating colonial conditions (Hemphill & Blakely, 2015). In nation-states living out the legacies of genocide, enslavement, land theft, and various forms of colonialism, the objective of schooling as an assimilationist project remains opaque and normalized from the white lens, while arguably clear to BIPOC (Alim & Paris, 2017). As Alim and Paris (2017) described:

The purpose of state-sanctioned schooling has been to forward the largely assimilationist and often violent White [*sic*] imperial project, with students and families being asked to lose or deny their languages, literacies, cultures, and histories in order to achieve in school. (p. 1)

An education system steeped in a colonial framework exists in tandem with other structures of colonial power like the violent policing of BIPOC communities. These colonial conditions are exacerbated by a culture of settler fragility or discomfort (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019), and it is within this landscape that we sought to explore the implementation of three projects intended to decolonize in our specific areas of education.

Vital to decolonization is the work of Tuck and Yang (2012). We want to make clear that the intention of the work presented in this paper is not to use the term decolonization as a metaphor nor to appropriate Indigenous knowledge. Tuck and Yang (2012) presented ideas or ways settlers attempt to move to innocence or alleviate settler guilt and complacency. When speaking of “decolonizing pedagogy,” it is nev-

er enough to say that one has “arrived.” We want to emphasize that we are not presenting these projects as examples of actualized “decolonizing pedagogies” since these projects still occurred on Indigenous lands, but that their intention is toward a decolonizing pedagogy. We shifted our conversation from merely decolonization and decolonizing pedagogy to include racial justice education to examine the parallels within (white) settler fragility.

Overview of the Community-Based Experiential Learning (CBEL) Process

In Prescott College’s limited-residency Ph.D. program in *Sustainability Education*, doctoral students take the core course, Sustainability Education. This course introduces students to critical pedagogical frameworks for sustainability education. One of the major course assignments is a Community-Based Experiential Learning (CBEL) project that grounds hands-on, experiential learning—learning by doing—within the students’ communities (B. Santo, personal communication, April 25, 2019). By connecting students to the community, students combine theoretical concepts and content with praxis. With the opportunity to enact advocacy and activism within the context of the students’ local community, CBEL projects reinforce course learning outcomes and offers a sense of engagement and depth to the course, particularly in an online learning environment (Fox, 2020). CBEL projects attend to the responsibility and ethics that challenge normative and colonial frameworks of traditional service-learning and institutional experiential learning (Stoecker, 2016). Often these CBEL projects are opportunities for students to bridge activism with course content, so these projects might focus on marginalized groups and the social and environmental injustices affecting these communities. Therefore, it is key to integrate principles of social justice activism and decolonizing pedagogy when students work *with* communities (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Freire, 2000; Glassman & Erdem, 2014). By focusing on a relational ethic, the instructor (Gree-

son) carefully mentored students to not perpetuate (neo)colonialism and impart unintentional harm on already oppressed groups (Santiago-Ortiz, 2019; Rose & Paisley, 2012).

CBEL projects are one structural way to attempt to distort hegemonic practices in higher education by centering community-guided praxis over broad theory. Another goal of the CBEL project was to decenter the instructor and work towards a collaborative, student-centered learning experience. So often, society sees professors as the pinnacle of knowledge production and dissemination, reinforcing hierarchies instilled in the academy—a system that, as Grande (2015) explained, “overvalues ‘new’ knowledge, fast productivity, and solidary thinking” (p. 3). Through an illustration of our three separate CBEL projects (i.e., Sassaman, Williams, and Yost), we provide examples of our attempts to implement decolonizing pedagogy that centers place and acknowledges colonial history as tools to unsettle narratives of white supremacy, assimilationist expectations, and defensive settler fragility embedded in educational structures. We explore the complexities of engaging participants in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) by discussing colonial history, paying attention to how settler moves to innocence can cause discomfort (Tuck & Yang, 2012), and exploring deliberate strategies to include Indigenous input in educational settings.

Our Collaborative Positionality

Our team is composed of sustainability education scholars with unique, intersecting, and complex positionalities and lived experiences.¹ While we all worked from the perspective of educators on these projects, we each teach in different contexts, including K–12 teacher preparation, outdoor education, and higher education. The inclusion of each of these frameworks is intended to provide a broad perspective of how decolonizing pedagogies can be implemented in a variety of contexts. We acknowledge our privilege as academics operating in higher education. We identify as settlers of multiple Indigenous peoples’ land (Lenape

Diaspora; Kānaka Maoli; Susquehannock; Tsalaguweti; Yavapai-Prescott), and from this settler lens, we seek to dismantle oppressive systems in education. Our team members operate from places of privilege and marginalization: white, biracial, cisgender, female, male, and queer identities with middle-class backgrounds laden with the research and educational privileges.

The CBEL projects in the *Sustainability Education* course were grounded in positionality, a concept introduced and unpacked at the beginning of the course. Central to sustainability education and CBEL projects is unpacking one’s positionality and considering how knowledge is culturally and socially situated and, perhaps more importantly, how this situated knowledge impacts learning and teaching (Haraway, 2015). Settler fragility often prevents a critical reflection of how positionality influences ways of knowing; researching and teaching; and place for each of us. Our CBEL projects must be presented for interpretation alongside an acknowledgment of our various identities and positionalities. Each explores the particular ways we sought to disrupt settler processes, but through this process, our projects simultaneously revealed “stuck places” (Ellsworth, 1989), wherein we were forced to grapple introspectively with our own settler-identities and reckon with how our own shades of (white) settler fragilities tinted our projects.

Context

Decolonizing pedagogy, educational practices that enact anti-colonial objectives, seeks to challenge dominant practices by acknowledging colonial history, centering place and Indigenous epistemologies, and rehumanizing values (Fernández, 2019). By integrating a social justice and anti-colonial lens, CBEL projects encourage work that dismantles power structures, builds community, and promotes experiential learning. Relationship to place as a co-educator is essential to enacting this framework as:

¹ Collective positionality was adapted from <http://depts.washington.edu/ce/se/>

settler colonialism can be interpreted as a form environmental injustice that wrongly interferes with and erases the socioecological contexts required for indigenous populations to experience the world as a place infused with responsibilities to humans, nonhumans and ecosystems. (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019, p. 38, emphasis in original)

Doctoral students developed and implemented these projects during Fall 2019, prior to the tumultuous climates of 2020 and 2021. Also, while writing this paper, police officers lynched George Floyd, igniting the largest civil rights movement in modern history. Thousands of protestors continue to march for Black Lives Matter and racial justice all over the world. And while anti-colonialism informed the development of our initial projects, our values at Prescott College center on social justice and intersectional environmentalism (“Our Story,” 2020). It would be irremissible for us not to include Black narrative within the settler-colonial landscape and in the development of this paper. It is an irrefutable truth that descendants of enslaved Africans are not settlers; they were free people abducted and displaced from their land. The construct of race was an intentional effort of the settler to create a hierarchy and enact a dehumanization process to define the “other” as an exploitable resource (Garba & Sorentino, 2020). Through this *resourcifying* process (Rubavičius, 2007), settler colonialism defines those who are minoritized, including the more-than-human, as a commodity rather than as equals. Often in the narrative surrounding decolonizing pedagogy, scholars become complacent as the prioritization is on a singular marginalized group rather than the relationship between all of those who have been, and continue to be, victimized by the desires of colonial conquest (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Rubavičius, 2007). Effectively grappling with this complacency requires the settler to recognize the centuries-long exploitation of BIPOC economically, politically, culturally, and educationally.

In this paper and in our praxis, we have been intentional about our use of terminology. As Tuck and Yang (2012) emphasized, decolonization is not merely a broad term to be used lightly in reference to any oppressive structure or policy as this reduces the meaning of the term. The colonial process refers specifically to the genocide of Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing. As non-Indigenous educators, we must be cautious in our approach to decolonial or re-Indigenizing praxis. As Episkenew (2017) expressed, “If one examines the text of works of Indigenous literature without examining the context from which it is written, Indigenous peoples become abstractions, metaphors that signify whatever the critic is able to prove they signify” (p. 323). Garba and Sorentino (2020) further critiqued the use of metaphor that reduces enslaved peoples to an object of forced labor and “how this object-orientation pulls slavery into its orbit, only to disavowal and subsume it” (p. 766).

Working within the sphere of academia, we see neoliberal policies creating performative structures whereby students cannot fully apply a transactional design that prevents critical humanity (Freire, 1993). From this framework, we argue for a commitment to decolonization in praxis in moving forward within our educational spaces, which we explore in the reflection of our three CBEL projects. In the narrative sections of this paper, we sought to center our own humanness in the work of our projects. You can also explore our reflexivity in our discussions of how we recognize that Black and Indigenous folx should lead the charge. We find our space of contribution in dismantling these frameworks and challenging white spaces through relationship building and reflection.

Place-based Approaches

Through designing and implementing CBEL projects, students develop a sense of responsibility and relationality with communities, place, and the land, as well as the skills to rethink place-based education, experiential learning, and sustainable futures toward one that includes Indigenous perspectives and

standpoints. In thinking about place, one must acknowledge the objectified commodification of land through colonization. From this deepened decolonial understanding of place, humans view more-than-humans as interconnected. In this framework, it is imperative that educators realize the commodification of both land and people (Garba & Sorentino, 2020).

Our insistence on centering critical place practices in our projects stems from a growing tradition in critical methodologies (Nespor, 2000; Soja, 2000). The 2013 special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry* (i.e., Vol. 19, Issue 10) dealt entirely with social justice education in relation to space and place. In the issue, Roberts and Green (2013) described how place might be useful to the researcher, contrary to the practice of anonymizing and ignoring the research location (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015), urging recognition of the “affordances of place” (Roberts & Green, p. 772). Booth (2014) observed, “There is a need to systemically and reflexively account for place and places in research, alongside the social position of the researcher and methods, and call for methodologies to be operationalized as if place ‘mattered’” (p. 92). Tuck and McKenzie (2015) proposed such a methodology with their outline of a holistic “critical place inquiry” (p. 1).

Tuck and McKenzie (2014) centered their proposed methodology on awareness of settler-colonial histories and ongoing processes. Settler colonialism is a specific type of colonization in which external populations permanently displace Indigenous populations. Settler colonialism results in a powerful sociopolitical organization that reproduces in the place of another and continues as a dominating structure for the new society. “As a specific mode of domination, it is especially concerned with space” (Veracini, 2019, p. 1). Settler societies are based on the continual dispossession of people from land and their replacement with other people, for whom it is inconvenient and “unsettling” to dwell on the story of their new place. After all, to do so would require reckoning with genocide (Grande, 2015).

Tuck and Yang (2012) discussed this as well by

referencing the re-occupation of land by colonizers, wherein those who have stolen land talk about the redistribution of wealth while failing to recognize the theft of Indigenous land on which the wealth was generated. Glenn (2015) illustrated how settler colonialism functions beyond a historical occurrence and as an ongoing structure that creates race and gender categories that function to perpetuate and reinforce its existence. This structural functioning happens as a result of a turning away from place-story, which has resulted in the push to incorporate critical place learning as an anti-colonial strategy (Simpson, 2014). Wildcat et al. (2014) argued that “we must find ways of reinserting people into relationships with and on the land as a mode of education” (p. 2). Following these suggestions, we considered how land may act as a framework for anti-colonial pedagogies.

Connecting again the idea that to acknowledge place in a settler-colonial society is to take a stance against current inequities, Tuck and McKenzie (2014) pointed out that “turning toward place requires acknowledgment and reparations based on the histories and structural processes of Settler Colonialism [*sic*] and capitalism” (p. 3). Our projects explore the possibility of intentional engagement with the settler-colonial place-story of the sites of our projects as a means of illuminating power inequities and its contemporary effects on communities living in these places.

How Does this Pedagogical Model Unsettle?

In moving through the CBEL process and continuing our reflections, we identified the overarching themes of disrupting settler fragilities with representative agency, place-based approaches, and experiential learning to decentralize hegemonic power in educational spaces. In CBEL applications in Prescott College’s *Sustainability Education* course, Greeson advised students to be hyper-cognizant of the *White Savior (Industrial) Complex* (Cole, 2012), which centers service-learning on the student’s career-oriented learning outcomes rather than working with the community for an equitable relationship. Being mindful of this,

Greeseon worked with students to think about ways their power and privilege might play out in community-based learning and engagement and ways in which these dynamics could cause unintentional harm (Bandyopadhyay, 2019; McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). Examining these power dynamics, students considered how they would work *with* their communities or communities that may not be their own. Students reflected on these dynamics throughout the course via individually written journals and collaborative group discussions. This reframing allows the knowledge and needs of a community to be centered. The organization of this paper is intentionally unsettling, infusing first-person narratives of praxis throughout theoretical frameworks. Our hope is that sharing these three narrative reflections will inspire introspection and dialogue about the incorporation of radical praxis in a variety of learning environments.

Students' Narrative Reflections

Williams' Narrative Reflection: Faculty Professional Development at a Predominantly White Institution

My time at Prescott College began my understanding of how positionality influences teaching. I work in professional development, and aligning this project with my own work (and incorporating it as a program offering) was a logical connection between research and praxis. I knew that the undergraduate faculty at the rural college I work at was the appropriate community for this project. I developed a workshop introducing decolonizing pedagogy to participants. I was cognizant of my own positionality and the context in which the workshop was conducted—a white woman leading a workshop for white faculty at a PWI. I used Tuck and Yang's (2012) article, highlighting moves to innocence, and emphasized how settler-colonizers use these tactics to ameliorate discomfort when decolonizing their classroom(s) and reckoning with their own role within a colonial and racist system.

In an initial survey that I sent to faculty asking

about their familiarity with decolonizing pedagogy, only five out of 22 respondents indicated that they had any familiarity with this approach. The workshop was available to any faculty in the undergraduate college with a capacity of 14 due to space constraints. A follow-up survey determined satisfaction; low participation made it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about the workshop attendees' experiences.

Creating an environment of open conversation can be difficult, particularly if attendees feel discomfort regarding the subject matter. However, it is vital that white educators grapple with the colonial roots of higher education. Higher education permits the continuation of racist action within the university system by rationalizing racism as *unconscious bias* (Tate & Page, 2018). Education in the United States indoctrinates individuals to social/cultural norms (Hemphill & Blakely, 2015). In higher education, racism and colonialism are intertwined. In considering the white academic space wherein this workshop occurred and the identities of participants, it is also necessary to reckon with the absence of voices and how this leads to the exploitation of BIPOC scholars and their humanity (Squire et al., 2020).

This workshop is not without criticism as it occurred within a vacuum of whiteness, treating the exercise as an academic practice meant to inform faculty, but absent from the current reckoning with systemic racial injustice within the United States. Applebaum's (2017) article provided a timely critique of the practice of absolving white discomfort in response to white complicity/white guilt. While not incorporated within the workshop, Applebaum provides an avenue for white educators and students to grapple with the discomfort of recognizing privilege and discover means to use vulnerability and critical hope to help promote meaningful change that will empower BIPOC. What remains is the understanding that the white educator or student must reckon with their own complicity. Instead, as Applebaum (2017) stated, "critical hope offers a sort of assurance that discomfort will be an opportunity for profound learning about not only the

other but also about oneself” (p. 872). This is directly relevant to the actions white people must take in confronting systemic racism directly highlighted by the ongoing protests in light of continued violence enacted by police officers on Black bodies.

When reflecting on the workshop’s outcomes, it is clear that faculty consider the context of broader pedagogical restructuring. I conducted this workshop prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent systemic inequities laid bare. Institutions have increasingly pushed for diversity, equity, and inclusivity training, practices, and pedagogical restructuring (Iturbe-LaGrave et al., 2021). This must include a plan for changing the process to create space for inclusive pedagogy. This workshop was a microcosm of good-intention absent of structural and process-oriented change. Workshops such as these may be intended to disrupt hegemonic structure within institutions, but they often perpetuate, instead, the hidden curriculum. Workshops are hegemony’s way of distributing information that may never be implemented or considered beyond participation in the session. On the other hand, attendees and facilitator may now be content with their participation and never continue the ongoing work of decolonization. These above-mentioned recommendations are systemic in nature where humanity may be lost. I believe it is my responsibility to work towards decentering whiteness and recentering the experiences of those marginalized by the academy.

Yost’s Narrative Reflection: Critical Place and Indigenous Perspectives in K–12 Education

I am a white woman, born, raised, and now teaching in Prescott, Arizona, a southwestern town shrouded in violent settler-colonial histories and current realities. In 1863, the U.S. army invaded the region resulting in the creation of Fort Whipple, followed immediately by miners and settlers. The U.S. military engaged in a brutally efficient campaign of genocide and removal of the Yavapai, directly targeting civilians (Burns, 2010; Braatz, 2003). The 1872 Skull Cave

Massacre resulted in an estimated 76 civilian deaths at the hands of General George Crook, for whom a central highway is now named in the region. There is no regional monument to the deaths at Skeleton Cave. The hesitancy to acknowledge place and its history is a self-perpetuating function of settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006).

My project, implemented in Fall 2019 with ongoing projects through the writing of this paper, was a participatory initiative that sought to include Indigenous needs and recommendations in the curriculum of a higher education teacher preparation program. I instruct in the teacher preparation program at Prescott College. In my position, I perennially grapple with the disturbing legacy of education as an on-the-ground force that enacts colonization on Indigenous groups through institutions like the Indian boarding schools and the mainstreamed curricularization of racism and assimilative pressures. These issues are far from historic in Arizona, as can be seen in recent controversies such as 2010’s H.B 2281, a legislation that banned high school ethnic studies programs, as well as many Latinx and Indigenous books from public schools, overturned in 2017 (Fernández, 2019).

This project sought the perspective of the local Yavapai-Prescott Tribe that enroll students in the Prescott Unified School District (PUSD) and invited Indigenous collaboration into Prescott College’s teacher preparation program. The project started as a series of questions: I wondered if PUSD met the needs of Yavapai youth; I wondered if the tribe had recommendations for teachers or had requests for educational support of which my department was ignorant. I also simply wondered what routes of communication, if any, the tribe preferred between the Yavapai-Prescott and Prescott College. As a middle-class, white settler teacher in a role that requires accountability to disrupt ongoing colonial practices in training teachers for K–12 education, many of whom go on to teach in the local areas, I was motivated to pursue this project to broaden my understanding and disrupt the tendency to assume or speculate what the Yavapai-Prescott

students, parents, and elders want out of a culturally-sustaining pedagogy. I crafted my project entirely around inquiry; proposing a solutions-oriented project at this point was premature when my department was not even in communication with the Indigenous communities of Prescott. I began this CBEL project to rectify this lack of communication, meet people, ask questions, and learn.

While I did not begin with specific projects in mind, some projects developed organically through the process of communicating. I learned that the K–12 school district’s Indigenous Education Program, a federal grant-based agency that provides academic support, rarely had enough tutors. In addition, Yavapai parents and students expressed frustration that none of the tutors were Indigenous students. I realized I was in a position to help in this specific frustration. One outcome of my project has been the oft-requested linking of the K–12 district Indigenous Education Program with Prescott College’s Indigenous Student Union (CHIWA), opening a channel for willing Indigenous college students to tutor and mentor the school’s district Indigenous students. In order to remove barriers to participation for any interested CHIWA student who wanted to tutor, the Prescott College Education Department arranged for the cohort of new tutors to receive education credits.

While this action fulfilled requests from the Yavapai parents and CHIWA students, it is critical to note that this development is not *decolonizing* on its own. It is not an arrival point; the curricular content being covered in the K–12 district Indigenous Education Tutoring Program is not pre-colonial. While the disliked feature (exclusively white tutors teaching Indigenous students) was disrupted, the reality is still one of cultural erasure. The students remain engaged, at this time, in primarily Western epistemologies, stories, and histories, in English, at the expense of Yavapai epistemologies, stories, histories, and language. While a step in a decolonizing direction, this example underscores the layers of complexity in seeking to disrupt hegemonic processes. One adjustment

will not decolonize an institution 150 years into a colonial process.

An additional outcome of the project has been an initiative for a curricular revision that acknowledges and integrates the place-based story of the Yavapai-Prescott Tribe into several of the Prescott College Education Department’s foundational courses, with the purpose of illustrating the U.S. education system’s complicity in colonization in local areas. The quest to generate a concise recent history from the Yavapai-Prescott perspective is fraught with complications, including lack of information, misinformation, and erasure, as is common in many settler-colonial locations. Communication with the tribe elders and historians, the Prescott College Education Department, and the city is in process at the time of writing of this article.

Seeking this history revealed a colonial mindset with which I was operating, as I assumed a homogenized Yavapai-Prescott Tribe would somehow convey to me, in some unified narrative, the way in which the many individuals within the tribe hoped their history would be shared. My expectations for a smooth project were jolted upon realizing the complexity of constructing a Yavapai-Prescott history. I was focused on forefronting a victim narrative that met my needs of critical pedagogy in my program but overlooked the ongoing trauma and work that reviewing and retelling violent histories continues to inflict on Indigenous members of the community in the act of collating these histories (Zembylas, 2008). The Yavapai-Prescott individuals I spoke with shared many histories but an overwhelming need to construct the “history” around resilience and success, not trauma and victimhood. I hope others involved in this work will pause to reflect that the researcher’s narrative needs are not overwhelming the narrative needs of the community. I overlooked the importance of a resilience and survival narrative to the Yavapai-Prescott individuals. My need for a finalized project, deemed decolonizing, must not supersede the needs of the community.

Sassaman's Narrative Reflection: Critical Place Conversations in Outdoor Education

This CBEL project sought to develop an intentional curriculum for both student staff and program participants in an outdoor education program at a PWI. The outdoor education program I work with is facilitated primarily with the Land of the Lenape People.² The common misconception of the area is that Indigenous peoples either disappeared through assimilation or reside on the Delaware Nation, Delaware Tribe of Indians, or Stockbridge Munsee reservation lands in Oklahoma and Wisconsin. The Lenape diaspora consists of the three federally recognized tribes as well as numerous local sovereign nations, including the Lenape Tribe of Delaware, Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Tribal Nation, Ramapough Lenape Nation, Powhatan Renape Nation, Nanticoke of Millsboro Delaware, and Lenape of Cheswold Delaware. Through the initial work of this CBEL project, I began building relationships with various individuals from the Lenape diaspora, including Denis Coker, principal chief of the Lenape Tribe of Delaware (a state-recognized tribe). Several sovereign nations still live in harmony with the area, yet state and federal governments of the so-called United States discount these communities who are hidden from the settlers who now occupy the area (D. Coker, Personal Communication January 8, 2021). Because of the forced removal and erasure of Lenape culture in the area, many settlers do not recognize the fact that this culture still thrives despite colonizing attempts. Anglicized Algonquian naming conventions of trails, waterways, and parks with stories created by white folklorists imparts mystification. Because the epistemicide began prior to the founding of the United States, a false narrative of assimilation has continually permeated, with a commonly held belief that these peoples simply vanished into the so-called American Melting-Pot. The continued abuse of the legacy and remains of Sac and Fox athlete Wa-Tho-Huk (Jim Thorpe), who was kidnapped from his people and imprisoned at the Carlisle Indian School, is a prime example of this repurposing

of story to soothe white-settler guilt at the expense of commodifying the *other*. This project aimed to establish a counter-narrative in order to help program participants un-learn the false histories of the places used for recreation (Hemphill & Blakely, 2015).

White supremacist logic has defined the field of adventure education and outdoor recreation as a venue where participants gain confidence in their ability to lead by emphasizing grit and resilience (Goodman, 2022). Not only does this further create a disconnection from nature itself, but it can have long-term negative consequences on participants (Brookes, 2003). Even with the increased emphasis on sustainable and minimum impact practices, the experience is still viewed through an anthropocentric lens in which one is a steward of the land rather than in relationship with more-than-human kin. Recreationalist misuse Principles such as Leave No Trace as a weapon to emphasize superiority to other visitors, often disproportionately targeting BIPOC (see, e.g., Williams, 2019). This approach centers the conquest and commodification of [stolen] public lands. Such a paradigm is rooted in the colonial history of recreation on lands acquired through genocide of native inhabitants. Though the practice of land acknowledgments has increasingly become commonplace in the field of outdoor education and higher education, there is an avoidance of critically reflecting on the full place-story that addresses the dispossession of the people acknowledged in these statements. These statements often cause further harm for the sake of white comfort as they merely mythologize “past caretakers” and fail to begin a conciliatory process of reciprocal relationship building with those acknowledged. As practitioners, we seek practices that highlight our embrace of inclusion. However, this intent is limited by a fear of having critical conversations surrounding the systemic oppression found in these spaces, negating these efforts. This ethos is antithetical to the common justification of outdoor education—embracing dis-

² This is emphasizing the relationship to people and land. Capital L is meant to emphasize land as a noun.

comfort to grow. Nevertheless, we fail to engage in these conversations to fully unpack how this history of oppression continues to maintain barriers no matter how inclusive we claim to be.

The film *Himalayan Ice* by Schmitz and Novak (2019) is an example of a perceived innocent embrace of white saviorism as the documentary was billed as centering an Indigenous perspective. The documentary instead devolves to the all too familiar narrative of two white Americans “teaching” the locals how to commodify their sacred climbing relationship. Recreation has fallen into the same plight of commodification of place described by Simpson (2017) regarding the settler appropriation of *Binoojinh* maple syrup harvesting, “in the context of capitalism, but they completely miss the wisdom that underlines the entire process” (p. 154). Reframing recreation *on*, to one of relation *with*, may help to challenge this paradigm and requires the re-learning of Indigenous wisdom erased through the pursuit of western values of escapism and conquest.

Despite recent movements to promote inclusivity outdoors, the common trope of those taking part in outdoor recreation centers white, “fit,” currently able-bodied, cisgender men. Illustrative of this tendency, in a review of 44 issues of *Outside* magazine from 1991–2001, Finney (2014) discovered that of the 4,602 pictures of people, only 103 featured African Americans (as identified by the author). When attempting to find similar research related to Indigenous representation in the media, I was unable to locate any related statistic, leading me to believe this representation is even more limited. This is consistent with what Tuck and Yang (2012) referred to “a(s)t(e)risking,” a “move to innocence” (p. 22) in research wherein Indigenous communities are often left out of research or demographic samples. Simply emphasizing a culture of inclusivity does not create a space for all to thrive unless outdoor educators critically look inward at the continued *othering* that transpires throughout this field. Chief Coker emphasized the Lenape people have had to “hide in plain sight” as

they sought to build relationships with colonizers of this area (D. Coker, Personal Communication, January 8, 2021). The State of Pennsylvania refuses to recognize the nations still residing in this land as “they know they owe us” (D. Coker, Personal Communication, January 8, 2021).

In my desire to create a cultural immersion experience for participants I fell into the trap of white saviorism with the expectation that the Delaware Nation would immediately embrace this idea. After initial frustration, I recognized my motives appeared as performative allyship and that I needed to take time to foster trust in order to humbly seek Lenape wisdom. Navigating the complexities of the relationships between the various sovereign communities of descendants from the original peoples has been a cause of constant self-reflection as I continue to unpeel layers of colonial violence. Taking time to acknowledge the Indigenous people who originally inhabited this space is vital; however, failing to fully address the history of genocide and displacement merely provides white comfort, absent of critical dialogue to process the full effects of colonization, which continue to impact people and place (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019). After integrating an honest place-story with the 74 program participants, a majority identifying as white women, over the course of the Fall 2019 semester, all connected with the counter-narrative of the so-called disappearance of the Lenape people. Upon return to campus, these students acted upon their un-learning to question practices taking place within both the classroom and administration. Driven by student advocacy, the administration is now working to develop a living land acknowledgment that includes action items seeking to mend injustices and build reciprocity with the broader community.

Building intentional relationships with one’s community challenges current constructs of learning. The educational system is not designed to inspire critical thought or community engagement but create cogs in the capitalist machine constructed for a few to achieve the myth of the American Dream. In addition

to the work-preparation function of U.S. education, it is designed to intentionally minimize economic development through the eradication of Indigenous peoples and the dependence on the forced labor of enslaved peoples. Critical thought may challenge these economic development motives as students assimilate into the culture of labor in a jingoistic approach to an American identity (Hemphill & Blakely, 2015).

As a co-curricular program at a university, there was confusion while developing this curriculum as the neoliberal lens defines outdoor education as fitting only within the discipline of health and wellness. There were questions about how outdoor programs are related to social justice. This viewpoint conflates the fallacy of expertise and specialization, further disconnecting modern learning from its true form as an interconnected process. One cannot actualize true wellness without fostering an equitable space that allows the individual to thrive with their community. With increased bureaucracy, there is pressure to justify the support of administrators by validating student success. However, career readiness measures rooted in “their capacity to obey” (hooks, 2003, p. 86) defines student success. Education has lost its sense of purpose as educators transact expertise rather than, “put a mirror in front of people so that they may see themselves truly” (Leyva, 2003, p. 120). By failing to address one’s settler heritage, educators cannot fully mitigate the flawed system of white supremacy that permeates all aspects of life. This recognition of how my identity continues to influence my intra-actions has reminded me to not merely view land as a classroom but as a co-educator. Rather than continuing to make assumptions, taking time to build relationships has allowed me to listen and examine how I can better leverage my privilege to create meaningful change. Navigating the complex relationships between the federally recognized (a colonial construct in itself) Tribal Nations and the so-called claimant groups is an ongoing process that requires more learning on my part as there is no easy solution to mend the shattered relationships within the region.

Conclusion

These CBEL projects and the writing of this paper occurred over a period of time where we, personally, and the country reckoned with the violent past, present, and possible future of the disruption of the colonial system. In writing this paper, we sought to share insight into how we have started and re-started the work of anti-colonial and anti-racist progress as educators. The implementation of our projects sought to move decolonial theory into praxis in our local community as we each grappled with strategies that counter colonial structures at work in our individual settings. We hope the illustration of the projects provides examples of intentional attempts to disrupt hegemonic processes in education and embrace humanizing and place-centered strategies. In each project, we intended to decenter the instructor’s authority by focusing on the community in its stead. We also hope these projects provide readers with examples of the difficult places we each encountered in decolonizing work and encourage continued introspection and accountability.

These projects did not conclude with the completion of the course but are ongoing as building genuine relationships with one’s community goes beyond the temporal constraints of the academic calendar. If researchers do not continue to nurture these relationships beyond the project, it continues to reinforce the resourcifying of those with whom we seek to learn. Through our projects, we have observed that the painful and messy act of reckoning with settler-colonial violence has the potential to disrupt narratives of white supremacy coded in assimilationist expectations by unsettling white hegemony in education spaces. At the same time, we have engaged with the ever-present tensions of balancing reflection of settler complicity in extractive structures with the responsibility to act. We encourage other settler researchers and educators to sit with these tensions, reflect, acknowledge occurrences of settler fragility when they inevitably arise, recalibrate one’s aim toward the relationship-building

work of community-centered praxis, and continue. In settings ranging from higher education, outdoor education, and teacher preparation, we have explored how centering place, Indigenous epistemologies, and rehumanizing values might work toward a decolonizing pedagogy. We also recognize that this work is not one of completion, but an ongoing journey where we falter, acknowledge our faults, apologize, and strive for continued learning.

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