

## Nations within a Nation: Cross-Cultural Field Insights in an Anishinaabe Context

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### Abstract

This case study of undergraduate early childhood education pre-service teachers in an international field experience examines living, working, and studying in a sovereign nation while still “at home” within the United States. In our various roles (researcher, pre-service teacher, faculty mentor), we explored the impact of colonization as we lived and worked with people who are Anishinaabe. We viewed the larger issues that tribal sovereignty brings to education in terms of federal and state standards. Our research focuses on the impact of this cross-cultural field experience on the pre-service teachers’ understanding of self as related to cross-cultural teaching. We employed a reflective multilayered process before, during, and following the field experience, and used qualitative emergent coding methods. Pre-service teachers developed an awareness of their individual comfort zones, recognized the power in strengths-based versus deficit-based approaches, and gained clarity on the cultural role of education and the role of culture in education. With this new knowledge, teachers may be better able to create culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogies in ways that allow for more meaningful connections with students and their families.

### Keywords

Early childhood teacher education; Indigenous education; International field experiences; Tribal sovereignty; Colonization; Anishinaabe

### Introduction

*“Comfort zones are exactly what they sound like [...] COMFORTABLE, but no growth happens there, so I’m doing away with ‘safe’ for this journey” (Lauren, May 17, 2016).*

This quote represents the desire of early childhood education (ECE) pre-service teachers at the University of the Midwest (UM; pseudonym) to challenge themselves when

moving across cultural contexts in a (domestic) international field experience. During the experience itself and throughout the research process, we learned that the journey to a deeper sense of teacher identity in relationship to another’s lived experience is ongoing and that cross-cultural experiences can serve as a spark for such growth.

In the United States, the achievement gap compels us to consider alternate approaches and

pedagogies for meeting each child's needs (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). The disparity between the demographics of the children who are not meeting expected academic standards (predominantly children of color and/or those with fewer resources) and those of the teaching staff (predominantly White) suggests the need to better prepare teachers for underrepresented communities (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012). University programs that move teachers toward a deeper understanding of colonization, racism, privilege and oppression increase pre-service teachers' awareness of equity issues as they take positions supporting children in classrooms (Nieto, 2010; Sleeter, 2001).

As an international field experience *within* the United States, this is a unique study of an initiative that sought to achieve such goals. Four ECE teacher candidates identifying as White women explored life in the classroom of a sovereign nation (Anishinaabe people) within a nation (United States). The term *Anishinaabe* is broad in scope referring to a group of culturally related Indigenous people including tribes in the United States and Canada (Treuer, 2012). Indigenous is used in reference to Native American Peoples, First Peoples of the United States of America, and specific tribes in the United States. The impact of colonization, specifically as it relates to the sovereign status of an Indigenous community, is explored before, during, and following the field experience. We propose that critical reflection on historical impacts and differences must be experienced by pre-service teachers to provide understanding of how personal experiences and biases influence how they teach children. The Indigenous field experience was another step in the UM ECE teacher preparation process and in understanding different populations. Our study is also unique in that the pre-service teacher researchers serve as co-authors of this paper.

This is an uncommon practice in research on experiential learning and strengthens our practical insights. The experience of visiting a nation within a nation and unpacking the policy, law, and governance of such a phenomenon as it relates to early education provides possibilities for cultural border crossing.

### **International Field Work in ECE**

Much of the research on teacher education that addresses diverse student populations (Auld, Dyer, & Charles, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Nieto, 2010; Nganga, 2016) has suggested the need for pre-service teachers to critically define and explore the histories and lived experiences of children and families. Urgency for this work is partially fueled by the continuing demographic disparity between educators (predominantly White middle class) and the populations they teach. As Ladson-Billings (2005) noted, "the real problems facing teacher education are the disconnections between and among the students, families, and community and teachers and teacher education [...] Today's schools are called on to serve a more ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse student population" (p. 229).

International fieldwork literature has focused on short-term global experiences where faculty have investigated student interest, involvement, and insights (Jay, Moss, & Cherednichenko, 2009; Madrid, Baldwin, & Belbase, 2016; Moss & Marx, 2011). Specifically, in teacher education, field experiences in diverse settings (defined as those different from one's lived experiences) offer new teaching contexts to pre-service teachers. However, the quality provided by such experiences has been critiqued, with suggestions of potentially detrimental impacts as these experiences may fail to provide support for deep internalization of self-awareness in a new cultural context (Auld et al., 2016, Jay et al., 2009, Madrid et al., 2016,

Rodriguez, 2011). For example, multiple studies have documented that these experiences tend to be less than a semester from start to finish and much of the research is written by faculty about pre-service teachers and global experiences. In some instances, contrary to intended program goals, Western ethnocentrism, biases, and colonial mentality are actually reinforced (Cushner & Chang, 2015; Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). These studies remind us that connecting across cultural contexts is a complicated process and that pre-service teachers may tend to be ethnocentric and stay focused on themselves during these short-term field experiences. Current research includes very few experiences within the United States, working with Indigenous populations exploring the effects field experiences have on pre-service teachers or the Indigenous communities. Our present study contributes to this growing body of literature. We focus on the intersection of identity, race, Indigenous culture, and the experiences of pre-service teachers engaging in international field work in their home country.

### **Field Placements in Indigenous Communities**

Indigenous populations in off-reservation public schools are growing, making Indigenous students less likely to have Indigenous teachers or teachers with “Indigenous cultural competency” (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Too often, partnerships, grants, and ECE initiatives with Indigenous communities are temporary and singular in nature (Brayboy, 2013). Consideration of historical trauma and teaching children in ways that seek to reclaim and recreate an authentic Indigenous identity are not infused in the classroom (Bombay, Matheson & Anisman, 2014; Brave Heart, 2007). As such, the educational experiences of children from Indigenous communities with sovereign status reveal a history deserving attention.

### **Sovereignty**

International field experiences with Indigenous communities in the United States require a basic understanding of the historical and political foundations of tribal sovereignty and the survival of Anishinaabe people. In the United States, there are currently over five hundred Indigenous nations with approximately three million people (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). However, the U.S. educational system regularly fails to teach how the United States came to exist and how these sovereign nations were created (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Tribes were moved through colonization into “retained portions of their original land” often called reservations (Hansen, 2018; Treuer, 2012) and despite the strength of early Indigenous governance, the move to reservations changed governance to a new model. Tribal nations had jurisdiction over land and tribal members. However, dimensions of those nations fell under separate state and federal mandates (e.g., gaming, taxation, criminal law), compromising the governance and authority of those sovereignties. Schools owned and operated by the tribe are also governed by the tribe. Clearly stated, “reservations are nations, not just cultural enclaves, landholdings, or communities” (Treuer, 2012, p. 87). In this Midwestern state, there are 12 Native American nations with a historical focus on endurance and renewal (Loew, 2013). Though legislative policy has shifted across time, the legacy of trauma caused by the effects of colonization and removal continues.

### **Intergenerational Trauma**

Our study acknowledges the impact of intergenerational trauma and colonization (Bombay, Matheson & Anisman, 2014; Brave Heart, 2007; Smith, 2012). Trauma-informed care has become common practice in many

school settings (Maikoetter, 2011). This approach considers adverse childhood experiences when providing additional behavioral analysis and pedagogical support for students (Ko et al., 2008). The impact of colonization, and specifically the residential boarding school experience, has had mental health consequences for current tribal community members (Bombay, Matheson & Anisman, 2014; Brave Heart, 2007; Centers for Disease Control, n.d.). Recent empirical evidence indicates a link between the impact of residential education on early generations of family members and the mental health status for current family members (Elias et al., 2012). This link influences classroom learning, where a child's behavior and inability to attend are frequently misinterpreted as a lack of capacity rather than a result of historical trauma (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Past and present approaches to address trauma include individual child intervention strategies and seamless engagement to build understanding at a community level. Addressing support and care for the child across contexts is required to resolve longer term issues (Bornstein, 2013; Ko et al., 2008). Engaging family members with school and community members provides recognition of the legacy of trauma while identifying appropriate steps to break oppressive cycles. Placing teacher candidates in a context where historical trauma continues to play out allows for them to develop greater awareness of trauma's impact in their future work with children.

### **Theoretical Framing**

#### ***Critical Reflection and Decolonization***

Although, as Smith (2012) suggested, colonization is an ongoing influence expressed through centering our research in Western notions of truth, we situate ourselves within decolonizing work and theorize this research

using decolonizing perspectives that account for intergenerational trauma. As non-Indigenous educators visiting in an Anishinaabe community, colonization and the impact of historical trauma framed our understanding and analysis (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2012; Swadener & Mutua, 2008). Smith (2012) called for deconstructing the power inherent in research practices, questioning whose interests were being served. This is a reminder to be wary of reinforcing the notion of *interest convergence*, specifically where the interests of dominant culture members are being met in the name of supporting the "othered" community (Bell, 1987). Researchers must consider whose interest is being served and to what end. Through recognition of the limitations and potential of cross-cultural teaching, the benefit of shifting the teaching workforce to reflect the cultural and linguistic heritage of the children is highlighted.

#### ***Reflective Practice***

Reflective practice allows access to concepts of power and privilege as they connect with insider/outsider identities. Through the use of critical reflection, frames of reference are opened, ways of thinking are adapted, and new perspectives are formed (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). Reflective practice suggests that learning is more easily applied to future experiences if the learner is able to have a concrete experience, observe and reflect upon the experience, and analyze the process (Kolb, 1984). Schön (1987) clarified this approach by emphasizing reflection during, after, and across the experiential spectrum. This often means journal writing, reflective notetaking, and providing seminar space during field experiences to "unpack" new knowledge. However, a note of caution is sounded as these practices have been questioned as overused, rendering them less powerful (Zeichner, 2008). Through overuse, reflection

becomes formulaic and superficial. In recent scholarly work, the use of traditional reflection has taken a post-modern turn (McArdle & Ryan, 2017). For example, teacher educators are looking to further reflection and offer variations of the practice, including transformative theatre and extended time to reflect (Eriksen, Larsen, & Leming, 2015; McGarr & Moody, 2010). Given the current critique and modifications of reflective practice, we found a multilayered reflective process before, during, and after the short-term field experience useful to acknowledge the self in context. The four teacher candidates engaged in the experience as participants, researchers, authors, and presenters. This builds on traditional approaches to reflection by adding an iterative layer. The process required (a) preparation for, engagement in, and reflection on fieldwork; (b) revisiting and discussing the reflections through coding and analysis; (c) writing about the discussion of the reflection; and (d) sharing insights through presentations with other teacher candidates and researchers at conferences.

### ***Placing the Self in Reflective Practice***

In this research we had different roles but sought “to map an intermediate space we can’t quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life” (Behar, 1996, p. 174). Our observations, interpretations, and relationships created images unique to our audience, making what we interpret, what we have access to, and who has access to our interpretations relevant. We were moving beyond our comfort zone, willing to struggle together in our research and writing, which began by recognizing ourselves as settlers and the varying identity groups within the settler role (historical immigrants, enslaved, new immigrants, refugees, etc.). This provided an

important foundation for our work, helping us to avoid “settler innocence” and opening a space for critical sharing (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

In our study, we were in a position of power, coming to the community from the university, but as pre-service teachers, we were also learners unfamiliar with the community roles and rules. We all identified as White women between the ages of 21 and 51. The depth and breadth of relationships among teacher candidates and faculty at UM and also between the UM community and Lakeland provided the foundation to support us in moving beyond a more superficial short-term field experience. At the time of the study, the four pre-service teachers had finished their final semester of classes after spending two years together in a cohort of 30 students and were preparing to complete student teaching in the fall. The motivation to go on the trip ranged from wanting to experience the topic of difference rather than just read about difference, desiring involvement in other undergraduate research projects, and expressing a childhood connection to Anishinaabe communities. The UM ECE program centered issues of equity using critical and ecological theories that honor the influence of race, language, culture, class, and ability. In addition, faculty in the UM community and Lakeland Community College had been working together over the past four years on articulation between the two institutions supporting Lakeland students in pursuit of a bachelor’s degree in ECE. The faculty mentor also wrote and presented with Anishinaabe colleagues on ECE policy and advocacy across cultures (Heimer, Nayquonabe & Sullivan, 2017). The writing relationship grew out of a history of 20 years, as the faculty mentor had taught in the Lakeland community after student teaching in New Mexico in the Tohono O’odham nation (Stachowski & Mahan, 1998).

As researchers, we held power in many situations, including recounting experiences and creating relationships with children, families, and staff in the Anishinaabe community. For this work, the pre-service teachers reflected through journal entries while in the field, reviewed these journals post-experience, presented insights to each other, and then continued to critique and reflect as we wrote together. Our inexperience in participatory research made us vulnerable through our observations. This vulnerability allowed us to connect more deeply. Our theory and method blended based on the history across communities, intention in coursework, and focus on reflective practice.

### **Methods**

#### **Anishinaabe Community Field**

##### **Experience Overview**

This study is part of a larger collaborative effort between UM and the Lakeland Anishinaabe community that has been ongoing for six years. This field experience was temporary and limited, but the coursework, preparation, and cross-context experience at the college and PreK-12 levels within the Anishinaabe community provided immersive reflective opportunities. While the goal at the center of the larger project is to create a more accessible pathway for Anishinaabe community members to complete degrees and licensing credentials in order to stay in the community and teach, the current study focuses on the cross-cultural aspects of the work as experienced by pre-service teachers who were not Anishinaabe. We use pseudonyms for people, places, and agencies in our research. The choice of the term Anishinaabe is intentional as it includes many tribes within the United States and Canada. Through the use of a more global term, we seek to protect the privacy of the tribe.

It is notable that this cross-cultural field study was supported through an international program at UM's Global Studies Center, especially given that travel was within the borders of the state. However, the university-level policy supported and acknowledged the Anishinaabe placement as international. Given the shorter duration and local nature, it was listed as a travel study field experience, included with international travel to Ecuador, Sweden, Jamaica, and other nations.

#### ***Coursework in the ECE Program***

The pre-service teachers were enrolled as ECE undergraduate majors in the UM dual licensure program (Birth to Grade 3 and Special Education). In multiple ECE classes, concepts regarding identity, power, oppression, privilege, race, and historical trauma were explored through readings, discussion, current events, guest speakers, and formal assignments. This field experience working in an Anishinaabe community was not required and fell between the fifth and sixth semesters of study. Therefore, we had completed seven field studies and two semesters of *the Identity, Culture, and Social Justice in Education* seminar prior to the Lakeland Anishinaabe cross-cultural field placement. The community service project in the seminar explored issues of homelessness, poverty, incarceration, and abuse by requiring research of specific agencies and their support structures. The self-interview was a key assignment spanning twelve months. The students responded to prompts on race, culture, and identity and eleven months later, returned to these interview answers to further reflect on their understanding of self in a context including power, privilege, and oppression as this relates to future teaching. In the *Working with Families in a Diverse Society* class, we used ecological theory to map the barriers and supports in our lives and the lives of others.

During the field experience in the Lakeland community, we were able to use a renewed understanding of ecological theory to consider possible barriers and supports for those in the community.

The realization that there were stages to racial identity development was powerful for us. Helms' (1990) six-stage model, emphasizing that there is no one way to move through the stages, offered a way to think about our racial privilege, allowing us to recognize ways to label and grapple with racial privilege and oppression before confronting colonization. We were able to place ourselves and consider our journey in racial terms. Similarly, Tatum's (2003) discussion regarding self-chosen segregation and racial community building granted understanding of healthy racial identity development. The coursework and related field experiences provided us with a strong foundation for this research and writing.

### **Lakeland Community Schools**

The cross-cultural field placement included pre-trip meetings, the *Introduction to Anishinaabe Culture* course at the Lakeland tribal community college with a faculty elder, field placements in PreK-3rd grade classrooms in the PreK-12 Lakeland Community School, cultural events, and post-trip monthly meetings. The teacher candidates entered the UM ECE program in January of 2014, traveled to Lakeland in spring 2016 for three weeks, and continued to meet with the faculty mentor post-graduation to write and prepare for a presentation in spring 2018. The racial demographic information for the Lakeland community was 20% White, 75% American Indian, and 5% two or more races contrasting with UM's 2018 reported statistics of 1% American Indian, 2% Asian, 5% African American, 6% Hispanic, 1% Southeast Asian, and 84% White. By temporarily shifting our

home context, we were required to experience the impact of the social construction of race from a new angle, gaining insight as racial beings. Though still members of a dominant culture, we were living and working in a new context with a dramatically different racial demographic. The teacher candidates lived together in a renovated boarding house within the borders of the community, approximately 300 miles from campus, yet three miles from all tribal school campuses. The owner of the home lived on site and had children who attended one of the schools where they were working. The teacher candidates enrolled in one Lakeland College course and spent 50% of their time with faculty and students at the tribal college.

The PreK-12 Anishinaabe Community School was built in phases through the 1980s and 1990s. It has an open concept with natural light streaming through skylights, children's artwork displayed in hallways and on lockers, and murals depicting recent pow-wow events. Tribally owned and operated, it was created to address the need for culturally appropriate education for children living in the community as opposed to bussing to the closest district school 14 miles away. Our experiences included breakfast with children and staff, walking to school Wednesdays along school trails, and various events. We were each placed in a different classroom to work with either a PreK, 1st, or 2nd grade teacher. We also observed in a language immersion school where the young students were taught solely in their heritage language through 4th grade. Faculty at both schools met with us and on the first day, an administrator of the PreK-12 school (who was also a tribal member) met with our group to provide an overview of sovereignty, the community's history, its traditions, trauma, and governance.

The cohort of students who participated during the first year of the Lakeland field

experience was comprised of the four teacher candidates. We were involved in two formal settings: the Lakeland College and the Lakeland Community PreK-12 school. Our time in the community spanned three weeks, including work in early elementary classrooms, participation on field trips, in the community attending special events and at the college learning with a faculty member. Our work spanned 40 hours per week and was equally split between our PreK-12 work and our college course. The teacher candidates earned one credit at the UM which is the equivalent of 50 hours of field experience.

### ***Introduction to Anishinaabe Culture Class***

Teacher candidates were enrolled in a three-credit *Introduction to Anishinaabe Culture* course at Lakeland Community College along with one local Anishinaabe student from Lakeland, Mindy. The instructor, who was Anishinaabe and had been the PreK-12 schools' principal when the faculty mentor was teaching at the school, provided a rich background of culture and traditions (Treuer, 2012; Densmore & Archabal, 1979). The student, Mindy, also provided critical insight throughout the course. In addition to course readings and discussions, we crafted and spoke the language, learned basic vocabulary, visited community sites, foraged for wild foods, and participated in ceremonies. These opportunities allowed us to experience Anishinaabe culture and history firsthand from the elder. Course content included an overview of community traditions and ceremonies including discussion of the use of tobacco, blessing of food, and religious ceremonies. We also discussed the history of boarding schools and the impact on current education systems. We participated in, and observed a variety of ceremonies, including feasts, an eagle feather ceremony, multiple graduations, a school pow-

wow, a red-willow ceremony, and picking fiddlehead ferns, wild onions, and wintergreen.

### ***PreK-12 Classroom and Community Experiences***

When we arrived at Lakeland, we toured the community with the faculty mentor and were each assigned a cooperating teacher in separate classrooms ranging from PreK to third grade. At the Lakeland PreK-12 community school, we met with a tribal school administrator, who provided an overview of sovereignty and governance, the history of the community and traditions, funding, and the influence of historical trauma. Time in the classroom included (a) writing and teaching lessons, (b) helping with lesson preparation and paperwork for assessments, (c) addressing behavior needs of children, and (d) packing up the classrooms for the year. We also participated in multiple field trips, including the nearby island community, local history museum, and a sacred river setting. We acknowledged the impact of our temporary presence in the community, and though we brought gifts for the classrooms, we recognized the potential damage that can be caused by short-term visitors. By creating an annual experience for preservice teachers at UM, a sense of stability is gained in the relationship at Lakeland and for the children.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

Ethnographic in nature, this qualitative case study focused on our reflective insights (Norris, Sawyer & Lund, 2012; Stake, 1995). Throughout the process of creating, experiencing, and reflecting on the cross-cultural field placement, we focused on our research question: How does a cross-cultural field experience affect pre-service teachers' understanding of self in relation to cross-cultural teaching? The data were the reflective passages and faculty feedback from our daily reflections, posted individually

online throughout the three-week experience. Photos were also used to trigger memories of interactions and illustrate connection or disconnection throughout the experiences. Journals were not graded, but comments were made on a website update page to encourage pre-service teachers to question assumptions and dig deeply into differences (e.g., school governance structure, cultural norms as played out in the classroom).

Approximately 12 journal entries per student (48 entries total) were coded. Each of the four field study teacher candidates participated in the data collection, coding, and analysis process. Assigned codes were applied initially including tourist, relevance, and barriers (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 2014). These were defined as times pre-service teachers felt like tourists, saw connected relevance between a Lakeland experience with children and future early education work, and when barriers were perceived in relation to understanding culture, children, or families. Once we coded our own reflections, we read across our own and the reflections of others, and made comments on intersections and insights within the work. With co-researchers, we cross-checked these emergent codes against the data. At length, insights were compiled and reviewed for intersections. The field experience, journaling, coding, analyzing, discussing, and writing were integral aspects of the methodology, taking place over the course of nine months of monthly meetings. In this process, the faculty mentor facilitated data analysis with the teacher candidates. A draft manuscript was read by the Lakeland PreK-12 community school administrator, the president of the Lakeland College board of regents, and the ECE faculty member at the college; two of these three participants are enrolled members of the tribe.

## Findings

### Comfort Zones

From the beginning, the pre-service teachers felt this field experience was different. Naming the difference and shift of power was tricky.

When we first began our experience, I was like, WOW this is such an aha for me, I'm finally on the inside of the "fishbowl" instead of the outside! [...] But then I took a step back and realized that I was still feeling the effects of white privilege (Lauren, May 20, 2016).

We are here to learn, make mistakes, go out of our comfort zone, and try new things! I'm trying to embrace this experience as much as possible, even if I have to feel "uncomfortable" at times! (Courtney, May 18, 2016)

Each student grappled with the shift from insider to outsider in her own way while still recognizing her "temporary" otherness. The ability to regulate was supported by the fact they all came back to the same rental house within the Lakeland community where they stayed together. They were living in the community, yet they were separate, coming together daily over the course of three weeks to decompress. There are aspects of bonding with other participants in a study abroad that can become detrimental if left unchecked, but the need to feel understood and connected with those experiencing similar struggles can be comforting (Tatum, 2003). This initial impact of seeing self as "other" jolted them into the disintegration stage of a racial experience as they were confronted with the segregation of the Anishinaabe community from the surrounding communities (Thomas, 2011). As students continued to recognize their position, they realized the risk and discomfort they had chosen.

It is easy to be myself and put down all of my guards when I am with the people who know me

best and share my background, ideas, and values. I don't have to worry about being under scrutiny and I can ask questions without worrying about offending anyone. It made me think about the self-interview (on race for the *Identity, Culture and SJ* seminar) we did and how I realized that I spend almost all of my time with people who have the same background and culture as me. I'm not used to being outside of my comfort zone (Lynell, May 31, 2016).

These insights came up later in our post-experience discussion and reflections. Pre-service teachers shared that they tend to surround themselves with those who share their backgrounds, ideas, values, etc. on a daily basis, and asked how they could continuously reflect on the discomfort once back in their home settings. Pre-service teachers suggested that the self-interview project from the *Identity, Culture and Social Justice* class forced them to look at "self" through a different lens and provided impetus to consider the cross-cultural trip. They acknowledged the privilege and ease of "sticking with what we know." They each struggled with their own insider/outsider "fishbowl" experience, and their shift—albeit temporary—from insider to outsider. They realized there is effort required when one is seen as unique by the dominant culture. This plays out as they considered new ways of thinking through the strengths and deficits of their new context.

### ***Strengths versus Deficits***

Pre-service teachers had a great deal of "practice" through coursework and seven other field placements to use a "strengths-based" approach rather than defaulting to deficit assumptions (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The field experience provided concrete examples of strengths-based thinking that made their previously abstract understanding more relevant. These insights were most available through interaction with their "translators,"

consisting of the Lakeland college instructor, Lakeland student, and community school administration.

I was almost brought to tears by how much the teachers, families and children at this school care about reviving language and culture. I have never felt more a sense of community anywhere and you can feel their passion when they talk. It makes me joyful for the children that they are growing up in an environment that supports their culture and encourages them to interact with it deeply (Lauren, May 23, 2016).

We took strawberries from the feast to eat later and because the food from the feast was blessed, we couldn't just throw the strawberry tops in the garbage – they either had to be buried, burned, or put in flowing water. On our way back from dinner, we stopped at the river and dumped our cup of strawberry tops in. At first, I thought it wouldn't be that important or interesting, but actually when we did it, it felt really powerful and it was a really great experience. I can't explain how or why it felt that way, but I think following tradition and following through with what we had learned felt good (Paige, May 17, 2016).

Pre-service teachers recognized their inability to "join" the community but wanted to connect in meaningful ways. The ability to engage with revitalization and pride as Indigenous people is limited as the pre-service teachers are outsiders, but they were able to connect to the passion. Though temporary, this offers an opportunity for students to relate to the tension of a borderland experience. Anzaldúa (2012) uses the term *borderland* when speaking of groups of people who live on an invisible border and have learned to live in both cultural worlds. Abiding by the cultural rules of both worlds is challenging. The UM pre-service teachers only had a glimpse at this challenge but expressed a deeper awareness of the desire for

community members to preserve the heritage, culture, and tradition.

Even with the strengths of the community acknowledged, the historical legacy of trauma influenced how the students framed their experience. There was a desire to learn more about trauma and a willingness to see how the community was building traditional solutions to the ills of colonization.

It makes me really aware that trauma informed care is important and being culturally sensitive is important and all the considerations that I've learned in the program really do need to be taken seriously (Courtney, May 26, 2016).

Just today, I overheard a child mention to the teacher that she was going to visit her Dad in jail over the weekend. One of her classmates asked her, "Has he been in jail since you were one like my Dad?" Wow – that's pretty tough to hear; jail becomes a "normal" thing to have happen in one's life (Lynell, May 25, 2016).

In this section pre-service teachers are applying earlier structures of theory (e.g., racial identity development) to better understand their reactions (Thomas, 2011). They recognize the inability to "have it all figured out" or the idea that biases are absolved through seemingly supportive actions. This stage of pseudo-independence was short lived as they realized the depth, breadth, and fluid nature of power. With consideration of trauma, the role of the settler became apparent.

I felt overwhelmed with all I had learned and saw....it was overwhelming to know that this whole community (and others like it) are so affected by historical trauma issues and it's a long road of healing and working through those issues (Paige, May 16, 2016).

It felt uncomfortable for me for this white guy to be telling the kids about their own culture and

history and, in a sense, glorifying what the Europeans brought to America (Paige, May 25, 2016).

It was also really shocking to me how there was a traditional Native American burial ground just feet from a marina with multi-million dollar yachts in it. That disparity definitely shows how the U.S. saw the island as valuable property and would not allow anyone to stay on or make it a reservation (Lauren, May 26, 2016).

The trip referred to a popular vacation spot where there are land battles and the only way the original inhabitants can use the land is to lease it. This field trip within the cross-cultural experience brought the settler experience front and center as vacation property illuminated the ways new landowners were complicit in the colonizing process. Teacher candidates express frustration with the inaccuracy of historical accounts and yet do not explicitly make the connection to their presence in the community. The excerpts in this section illustrate the dilemma faced by pre-service teachers: how to acknowledge the trauma of the past as it survives in hurtful ways today and at the same time honor the "good feelings" and joy for the cultural and linguistic richness. While the reflections themselves trace beginning understanding of the settler mentality, it was the process of coding, analysis, and discussion that reveals the tenacity of the settler identity. The purpose of the experience became clear; it was not a community service project. They were not there as saviors to "recompense the sins of the father" (Tuck & Yang, 2012). As they were troubled by their initial insights, they indicate a desire to honor the past, acknowledge the "long road" of trauma, and build on cultural strengths to offer new ways of being together, advocating for and teaching communities similar to and different from their lived experiences (Brave Heart, 2007). It was through the discussion together

and listening to peers in the community that teacher candidates were able to internalize the experience.

We spent the first two hours asking questions and discussing traditions and spirituality. I am glad Mindy (Lakeland Anishinaabe student) is in the class with us because she is able to give us the perspective of a young student and young adult. She does not sugarcoat the realities that the young people face and I appreciate her honesty (Lynell, May 16, 2016).

The appreciation for direct communication provides one way the pre-service teachers acknowledged the need for translation. Mindy, as a teacher candidate, provided the connection at the border for a more complete understanding of the lived experience at Lakeland. She was able to provide her experience as it related to their interpretations. Building on the notion of “borderlands,” we shift across the borders of time and consider the impact of colonizing past, present, and future by centering the strength of Indigenous commitment to education and tradition.

### ***The Cultural Role of Education***

Students entered the Lakeland community as the school year was ending and attended graduation ceremonies offering multiple opportunities to reflect on the role of education in the community. The pre-service teachers struggled with the messages they were receiving: They noted a stark contrast between the warmth and sense of community and the harsh message of educational achievement.

Take a public-school assembly: Everyone files in by class and they are all packed in like sardines and every student is expected to sit by their class. At this powwow, kids were up moving around, going up to dance, going to get a drink of water, running around [...] It's just so interesting

comparing a tribal school to a public school!  
(Courtney, May 20, 2016)

The seats filled up fast and there were people standing to the sides and in the back. It was really cool to see what a sense of community was present and how everyone came out to congratulate and celebrate the graduates (Paige, May 19, 2016).

The teacher candidates share that the notion of freedom was unfamiliar to them in a school setting and sought to understand the “why” behind it. Their comments show both anxiety and admiration for the community. As we interacted and engaged more, they learned about the daily challenges in the community and desired a better understanding of the impact of trauma.

I feel like we touch a lot on other factors that make up the whole child [...] not just academics. It is interesting how much that comes up (Lauren, May 20, 2016).

Staff understand that students may be living in the shelter, at the Casino, with other family members, etc...and they have a responsibility to care for the students just as much as they do to educate them (Lynell, May 16, 2016).

These quotations provide evidence of the emotion experienced as preservice teachers struggle to make sense of the impact of colonization in their classrooms. The following quotation offers insight into how the pre-service teachers were engaging with, and learning from, community members. The idea of reaching educational milestones to lessen the impact of historical trauma surfaced.

For me, the overwhelming message that I heard throughout the ceremony was how significant graduating from college was to the community

and the culture. The student receiving the highest honor was a young lady, majoring in Early Childhood Education. She talked about how she is going to take her education and use it to better the children in her community, enriching their lives, encouraging them to embrace their Anishinaabe culture and to become an example in the community (Lauren, May 19, 2016).

Higher education is presented as “hope.” Even though achievement is through Eurocentric institutions, the reclaiming and cultural revitalizing process is enhanced by importing required degrees for teaching (Best, Dunlap, Fredericks, & Nelson, 2013). The language immersion school is a powerful example of supporting education as central to success while encouraging connection to the history of the people (Smith, 2012). Graduation messages included the importance of education for survival, leading to pre-service teachers’ own reflection regarding higher education as it relates to access, or barriers to that access, in terms of race, poverty, and historical trauma. The history of education in this community is fraught with violence and assimilation (Treuer, 2012). It is understandable that success through culturally and linguistically relevant programs is celebrated. The pre-service teachers’ awareness of historical legacy emerged as they engaged with community members across multiple contexts.

### Discussion

*“People often assume that exposure to diverse groups will promote cultural competence and intercultural understanding. However, exposure alone does not mean teachers will understand how their emotional actions and reactions are grounded in social and cultural worlds”* (Madrid et al., 2016, p. 348).

In what ways did a cross-cultural field experience affect pre-service teachers’

understanding of self in relation to cross-cultural teaching? Our findings revealed that pre-service teachers demonstrated (a) a deeper, internalized understanding of the impact of trauma on children and families, (b) an understanding of historical legacy and colonization beyond a false history, and (c) continued reflection and application of this experience in their lives today. These insights mirror research conducted with pre-service teachers in international settings who experienced racism, recognized the need for risk taking, and shifted between insider and outsider status (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011).

In our work, pre-service teachers experienced a way to perceive the ongoing effects of historical trauma and the current causes of today’s wounds and abuses. They struggled to face the idea that trauma is not “all about me.” Instead, they could experience their perceptions and understandings of what they were witnessing without minimizing, othering, over-identifying through settler nativism, or explaining away through “settler moves to innocence” (Tuck & Yang, 2012). We suggest this deepened insight comes from the creation of a foundation of context and practice before the literal journey (Rodriquez, 2011). The dialogic journaling and reflection before, during, and after keeps the experience from becoming easily summarized and, therefore, packed away like a souvenir (Jay et al., 2009). Courage and vulnerability were needed to fully engage in the cross-cultural experience. Therefore, the experience should be made available to all pre-service teachers seeking an understanding of history and those dedicated to serving all children. The UM Anishinaabe field experience has continued and teacher candidates who identify in categories other than dominant groups have joined. This offers potential to further explore varied understandings of settler identities.

The support and patience of the members of the Anishinaabe community were paramount as we struggled to recognize, own, and process the reality of our nation's history in today's classrooms. We were reminded of our intention to avoid the dangers of interest convergence, or continuing to serve the interests of the dominant culture. Cross-cultural field work supports recommendations from tribal communities regarding the school environment for Indigenous youth that call for (a) cultural competence training, (b) information for access and equity awareness, (c) appropriate identification for students with special needs versus overidentification, and (d) curriculum and pedagogy that recognizes culture, tradition and language, among other recommendations (Best, Dunlap, Fredericks, & Nelson, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Teacher educators and early childhood educators are complicit in perpetuating a false history if we fail to acknowledge the generational impact of erasure and segregation. This is powerful in terms of the aims of critical theory: to stay present with power issues, to continue to build understanding with others across time, and to know that we are always immersed in this struggle. The nature of visiting a nation within a nation and unpacking the policy, law, and governance of such a phenomenon as it relates to early education has relevance and importance.

There is a deepened understanding that schools are an extension of the community; therefore, we need to be a part of the community, not just a part of the educational institution. There are boundaries and distinct goals for the school and the home but there should be an intertwining with the child at the center. Our program was short; therefore, it could be framed as superficial. In more deeply reflecting on the experiences, we came to realize connections were made before, during, and after the experience. It was in the iterative process,

including the writing and presenting of this research, that pre-service teachers came to realize the meaning of a changing sense of self. The work continues as these new educators bring deepened insights regarding colonization and historical trauma back to their communities.

### Implications

*"American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it"*  
(Baldwin, 1963, p.44).

This research included the voices and perspectives of faculty and student participants at the UM, but the glaring absences are the voices of the Anishinaabe community. As White participants, we are unable to center Indigenous knowledge (Smith, 2012). Even though the larger research project included duo-ethnography recounting the intersection of our lived experiences across cultures, more work to center ontological approaches that honor Indigenous knowledge must be considered.

Partnerships with Indigenous communities can be too brief and superficial, with researchers following funding sources to new communities. This suggests a dangerous and continued pattern of colonization. Leaders in each community must be committed to keeping the pain and promise at the center so that as the researchers and participants change, the communication across contexts remains. In 1972, the Indian Education Act created policy "for the establishment and operation of exemplary and innovative educational programs and centers, involving new educational approaches, methods, and techniques designed to enrich programs of elementary and secondary education for Indian children (p. 340). Our research serves as a reminder to acknowledge the intersection of home and school contexts by shifting the teaching workforce to more accurately reflect the

varied cultural and linguistic lives of children in classrooms.

We hope we have raised awareness of what is and is not possible in a short-term cross-cultural field experience with an Indigenous community. We call for ongoing discussion through forums and blogs for pre-service teachers to connect across institutions and share insights and struggles regarding international experiences. Immersing ourselves requires a deeper iterative process and one in which we listen, reflect, and share in an ongoing cycle.

Teachers must act with greater political clarity about whose interests are served by their daily actions. They may not be able to change some aspects of the situation at present, but at least they will be aware of what is happening (Zeichner, 2008, p.8).

Our research highlights an imperfect understanding and interpretation of the lived experience of a shared colonizing history. These new teachers enter their classrooms fresh from this experience, more comfortable with the discomfort that is necessary to connect with distant others—some within our own borders.

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