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Łe:k'iwhlaw 'O:lts'it: Knowledge-Gathering as a Methodological Approach to Na:tinixwe-Based Inquiry

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The best place to gather knowledge for future use is from elderly people.
—Verdena Parker

Academic researchers don't own the process of asking questions and finding out the answers. Our ancestors have been doing this for thousands of years. We can see it reflected in our stories, our ceremonies, our food practices, and all of the brilliant other lifeways they conducted and we continue to conduct today. So, what does inquiry look like from the perspective of Indigenous communities? The better question is, what does inquiry look like in *each individual* community? This question is important because inquiry will look different in each setting. Yet we can identify some common themes that will be important to highlight here so that others may take on this important work in their own communities. Inquiry from Indigenous communities is most authentic when it comes from community members themselves. What are the questions that are most pressing to them? What are the ways their communities have already addressed them?

Often today our communities are in survival mode, just trying to make it through the day: tending to their families, earning a living wage, reacting to the many crises in

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

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their daily lives. It's so hard to find the time and space to slow down and take care of ourselves, let alone conduct Community-Based Inquiry projects. We may not have the time, space, or opportunity to stop, reflect, and formulate these questions, even though we know they are in great need of asking. This is yet another area of ancestral revitalization that we must enact.

This article will highlight the ways in which my community and I have taken part in this process and will reflect on important connections between the ways that we and other communities have done this, with a specific focus in early childhood contexts. Each community context is so unique and yet we also share many of the same struggles and can learn so many great things from one another's experiences.

Community-Based Inquiry in Na:tini-xw

When tasked with conducting a research inquiry project for my PhD program, a dissertation, I knew that it had to be *with* and *from* my community. But what does this mean? For me it meant that I didn't start with myself or the questions that were most important or interesting to me in that moment, but the questions most urgent to the *community*. What questions needed answering for the betterment of the entire community? What inquiry projects were already underway that I could take part in? My first inquiry project with my community took place in 2014. We looked to identify the current state of the Hupa language within the community in order to plan where we wanted to be and how to get there. I held conversations with community members, and one idea that kept coming up was the idea of having our own language school. This led me to research Indigenous language schools, which pointed us in the direction of starting a language-immersion school.

But rather than just stop at finding the answer on paper, some other Hupa language-learners and I decided to test the immersion method in a weeklong pilot immersion program. This was a transformative experience for us as community members, as language advocates, and as aspiring language teachers. What is more important, it was equally transformative for the kids who were able to take part in it. We didn't quite know what we were doing, but we knew that the question at hand was too urgent to merely continue to talk and identify answers. We knew we had to "go and see" as Xontehł-taw (*Coyote*) would and try it out. The children loved our program, playing games in the language and eating snacks together. They were four to six years old and didn't feel the trauma, pressure, and shame that can come with not knowing your Indigenous language but rather just the joy and fun of the activities. This was the answer to our question: bringing together Hupa children and Hupa language in a dedicated, safe space. Putting our findings into action became central to all the following work we would do.

Due to life circumstances, we weren't able to do another immersion program for a few years, although the children often requested it. This was something that really stuck with me. My ongoing responsibility to the kids was not just in the moment of that specific inquiry project but throughout their lives as a part of the community (they are now in high school and talk about that program). I knew that if we were

going to conduct such a meaningful project again with another group of kids, we had to be consistent with them. In 2017, we were able to obtain grant funding to conduct a community-wide immersion camp. Feedback from our pilot immersion program told us that it needed to be much more grounded in Hupa epistemology.

The first one we did was centered around common school games and activities like charades. One of our primary collaborators, expert Hupa language-speaker Verdena Parker, told us that a Hupa approach to teaching young children would entail teaching them through telling our traditional stories. Therefore, we centered this camp around the Coyote story, "Xontehł-taw łixun yixonehłts'e:tł." Coyote became a teacher of both language and life lessons for the teachers as well as our students. Since this initial camp in 2017, we have continued to build and expand based on the feedback from teachers, students, families, and community members.

In my graduate work, I was able to reflect and enact Na:tinixwe (*Hupa people*) approaches to inquiry. Here I will lay out these approaches to redefine what it means to do research with the Na:tinixwe. This renewed definition should make it clear that the work done with the community *has* to have a positive lasting impact on the people and places one works with, and that those people should guide what that looks like. I see my role as a Na:tinixwe and Shinnecock thinker and scholar to conduct inquiry that is strictly community-based, community-driven, that leaves a lasting impact on the people and the place. I see myself as following in the footsteps of all of my ancestors as well as all of the Indigenous scholars who have come before me, scholars who pushed, refused to compromise, took space and broke rules so that I could write this way today.

Relationality through Praxis

Dundi ne:sin? (*Who are you?*) This is one of the most important questions to think about when undertaking a Community-Based Inquiry project. The question asks not just who you are as an individual but, more important, who you are in relation to the community and the questions you are attempting to answer. This is evident in the ways that we introduce ourselves: *Sara* wholye', *Sara*, they call me. You are always someone's something as evidenced by the possessive prefix in each of our familiar terms. Whidehch (*my sister*), xowunchwing (*his/her/their mother*), nohya:ch'e' (*our daughter*). Here, I reflect on who I was and am within my community to understand how that *must* affect the ways that I undertake this work. It is through honoring relationships with those I work with—children, parents, teachers, and elders, as well as the land and the language—that the inquiry moves forward in authentic, ethical, and (most important) Na:tinixwe ways.

One example of my reflexive relationship within my community as a young person was the Na:tinixwe mixine:whe (*Hupa language*) name I was given as a learner-teacher in our ye-silin (*re-envisioning praxis*) camps. In the second ye-silin camp with the Hoopa Tribal Afterschool Program, all of the teachers took Na:tinixwe mixine:whe names that the students could address us by. They had already established this practice within their program, that students would have Na:tinixwe mixine:whe names.

This was a precedent we obviously did not want to upset. Other teachers already had Na:tinixwe mixine:whe names, either given by their families ceremonially or given by elders in the community language classes.

The majority of the teachers are a few years older than me. In the early 2000s and prior, fluent speakers would get together to host community Hupa language classes. These classes were often referenced in many of my conversations. My parents took my sister and me to these classes; however, I was very young and do not remember much about them. What is often expressed about these classes is that they were a wonderful time when community members of all ages would get together to learn the language, eat food together, and have a good time. These elders were many of the teachers of the second language speakers that we have as Na:tinixwe mixine:whe teachers today. The elders would also go into the Hoopa Valley High School Hupa language classes to visit and teach students.

Unfortunately, as I enrolled in language classes, many of those elders that had given the teachers names had passed away or no longer attended the language classes, so I was never really given a Na:tinixwe mixine:whe name in the same way. However, wha:t (*my older sister*) and her friends (some of whom are the very teachers I was just mentioning) used to call me whidehch (*younger sister*), so that became my Na:tinixwe mixine:whe name. It may seem odd to be called "younger sister" by eight-year-olds, but my hope for them and their Na:tinixwe nohje:' (*Hupa epistemological*) journey is that they will grow up to speak the language and acquire so much more Na:tinixwe knowledge than I had at their age. I hope that one day they will be *my* teacher, and so "younger sister" in that situation felt like a promise for them in the future. It was also appropriate for me to learn from the other teachers who had been working with tribal programs and children for many years. They have knowledge that comes from their families, their teachers, and the land. I am so grateful for them to share this knowledge with me and with the students of our camps and for sharing this work here. I am the little sister, who observes the older siblings, to learn and benefit from their knowledge and experience.

Throughout this particular inquiry process I was also ya:xoya:ch'e' (*their daughter*) of my family and Na:tinixwe. I lived either with my parents or my mother-in-law when I was not away at school. This meant that in certain situations the planned inquiry activities that would be seen as "research" were not my priority, but rather the responsibilities of being a daughter. For example, one day I was leaving the house to do a conversation with someone in the community, and as I was leaving a white van pulled into the yard. They asked if my dad (a tribal elder) was home. I said no, and they asked if I wanted to take a salmon for him. I knew this would add at least fifteen minutes to my departure time, but I couldn't pass up this gift for my father. So I accepted the fish, fresh out of the river, slimy and whole besides its gutted belly. I took the fish back in the house, washed it off, placed it in a trash bag in the fridge, knowing that directly after my conversation I will have to come back and fillet it. That's one of my many roles as a daughter in a Hupa family. This gives me less time to formally write or read, and yet is central to this project.

If the overall goal of this inquiry project is for a resurgence of Na:tinixwe knowledge and lifeways, then both the familial relationships and the relationships between myself and łoq' (*salmon*) must be upheld and really prioritized as central to the work. Through this relationship with salmon I am also able to think through one of the vital Na:tinixwe educational practices, the appropriate way to prepare a fish to eat, and to honor its life. Taking the time to prioritize and honor these relationships provided an opportunity to reflect and realize new important questions and pathways to answers. One question that arose from this experience was, *How do we create a place and time where these lessons are, once again, central to the curriculum and interests of the people?* This question helped to guide future inquiry projects that expanded on the one reflected on here. Community-Based Inquiry should be long-term and move with the needs of the community as time goes on.

In addition to being the literal daughter of my parents and the responsibilities that this entails, I am also a daughter of Na:tinixwe and Na:tinixw. This community, land, and people raised me. I am still a daughter who has so much to learn from them. I have recently become a mother, and I look forward to working and reflecting on how that will undoubtedly affect the current projects we are working on. To be home to do this work with my community is such an honor and responsibility, to do the work in a good way. This is reflected in my approach to this project as well. I am the learner in most situations. There are some skills and knowledge that I have gathered in my schooling that are valuable to the community and to this project, but they cannot and should not be placed in an intellectual hierarchy above the knowledge of the community. Who is asking the questions and seeking the answers is central to any Community-Based Inquiry project, and who they are in *relation* to those they work with—human and non-human—should guide the approaches taken.

Łe:k'iwhlaw 'O:lts'it (*Knowledge-Gathering*)

In this inquiry project I continually asked myself questions: *Is this one of the many Na:tinixwe ways of doing this? How would the ancestors conduct this process? How would they write about it? How would they think about it? Are these processes in relation to the land? Is there a Hupa word for this concept that would be more appropriate?* After working, reflecting, and, what is most important, *speaking* with community members, I've come to understand the specific approach to inquiry that we were taking in our projects to be: Łe:k'iwhlaw 'o:lts'it (*knowledge-gathering*). Knowledge-gathering is a careful and intentional process, which prioritizes sustained relationships with all of those involved.

I asked Wha:dichwing Verdena a few different times how she would express the process of research in Na:tinixwe mixine:whe. I am a second language–learner and I work with Wha:dichwing as much as I can to gather language to teach and use in our community. We went through a few different iterations of different words and phrases with different sentiments in a few of our language-learning and gathering sessions. However, I was still thinking and asking through a Western academic framework rather than a Na:tinixwe mixine:whe epistemological frame. Then I thought back

to a meeting I had with one of my dissertation committee members, Beth Piatote (Nez Perce) and the ways she explained our presence in the university away from our communities. She said, "We're out here gathering like we would do years ago. We are gathering information to take back and share with our communities." This really helped me to think through why and how I would be in the university if I had to be here. It's also a great example of how connecting with others from other communities can help you think through issues and even approaches to Community-Based Inquiry in your own community. So, I started to think about gathering. I thought, *What would I be doing if I weren't here in graduate school?* Whether it were 2019 or 1819, as a Na:tinixwe woman I would be gathering.

For Na:tinixwe, there are many different types of gathering processes. We gather acorns, basket materials, medicines, berries, firewood, rocks, building materials, materials to make regalia. Everything that we create has to first start with a process of gathering. There are even different words in the language depending on what, when, and where you are gathering. There are of course different approaches to gathering that originate in families or individual preference. The strength of this approach is the diversity of ways that one can accomplish the task; each way is no more or less valid than the other.

However, there is still a basic formula that one enacts in virtually all gathering practices. First you go out on the land, but not just anywhere. There are certain places, known within the collective memory of the community, where the specific thing you are trying to gather can be found. But you can't just go out at any time. You must also know *when* to go. Is it the right season? Is it the right time of day? Are you in a state of mind and heart where you should go? You make a plan for what, when, and where you gather. Once you have your plan, you go out. If it looks like it is appropriate to gather, then and there you introduce yourself to the land. You tell it why you are there and that you come in a good way. You tread lightly and only take what you need. Sometimes you have to adjust what you thought you needed based on what the land is willing to give you in that moment and in that place. Once you take what you need, you leave an offering and thank the land for what it has given you and leave in a good way. Following your gathering process, you make sure to use, store, or prepare everything that you have gathered so that everything was taken with a reason and purpose.

I want to put forth łe:k'iwhlaw'o:lts'it (*knowledge-gathering*) as a community-based approach to inquiry to make the academic space for such a uniquely Na:tinixwe approach. At the same time, I also aim to theorize łe:k'iwhlaw'o:lts'it as a methodology that is capacious enough so that other Hupa researchers after myself can make it their own, and other Indigenous scholars can find an appropriate adaptation for their own communities. To be clear, łe:k'iwhlaw'o:lts'it is nothing new. It is not a new approach that I have invented here but rather something that comes from our people and our languages—something that we have always done. This project and I are part of a much longer continuum. None of us discover the things we are gathering, but rather use them for our communities and families, and parts of what we gather are given back through the process. I inherit this practice from my ancestors, and I know that others will come after me and continue on our ways.

To gather knowledge in the context of research, one must look for the specific tool or materials to fit your project. One must only take what one needs and what one will use. Although I may have wanted to have conversations with everyone in the community, I also knew that I would only be able to meaningfully engage in discussion with so many people at one time. This also helps me to put away my recorder and not overcollect or take over spaces with my research when it is not appropriate. Sometimes meetings just need to be meetings. I can't waste people's time. Gathering is never really a finished process, just something you do temporarily, until you need to do it again for something else, for another time, for another group, in another year.

In Na:tinixwe epistemology, one must always gather with a purpose. If I am gathering knowledge, it must also mean I am going to create something. The specific word I am using for gathering in this work, *łe:k'iwhlaw*, is a broad term that can mean to gather any type of object. For example, it can mean to gather firewood, to collect things, and to bring people together. Literally, it translates to "I finger things together." This translation is appropriate for my usage here as I am gathering knowledge by bringing people together, listening and collecting their ideas, gathering language to create the *ye-silin* camps—physically gathering on the land with teachers to prepare for the camp and the students. There are many other specific types of gathering that come with their own words, such as ky'a:dawhne (*I am gathering acorns or other round objects*), which reinforces the centrality of gathering to Na:tinixwe epistemology. I am bringing together things that are known in order to make something with it: the article you're reading and, what is more important, the praxis we were able to undertake throughout our inquiry process.

Gathering is always an ongoing process; however, the gathering for this specific project is also fixed in a time and place, and only shared with one group at a time. I see this as very different from data collection. Calling the work product that you collect *data* implies that you are out collecting raw materials. It inherently places the researcher as the authority, the one who *makes* it knowledge with their analysis, with no recognition that the knowledge was already out there. This is why I insist on naming it knowledge from the start. I am not creating the knowledge, just as I am not creating the acorns or wood or plants I might gather. They are part of a much larger project of creation. Rather, I am just gathering what is already out there, to create something for all of us: the *ye-silin* youth camps and the writing about it that will be shared with others to learn from. This does not make me an expert but a gatherer and a creator. In this role, I now have a responsibility to actually use and create from what collaborators offer to me. This is the agreement we enter into when gathering something. I also must give an offering. At each conversation, meeting, or camp, I planned to give back something, no matter how small or symbolic. I wish I could have given more, but there were constraints of capitalism—my being a graduate student at the time. This offering was whatever I had access to or felt appropriate at the time with each person or group. Curriculum was something that I could always give. This is a perk of having this built into the project.

Think about the difference between gathering and collecting. Gathering comes with rules, accountability, responsibility. Collecting doesn't necessarily come with

any of these. I think this is why it has been necessary for so many articles to be written about reciprocity in the research process, because it is never inherently there. Collection sounds a lot like accumulation, which sounds a lot like capitalism. This makes me think about the teachings from the Coyote story, which is also a story about gathering versus collecting. Coyote got greedy and wanted to collect the sweetballs and that killed him. Colonial researchers collected our ancestors. Our remains and other sacred objects are stored in collections. I'm not collecting *anything*. They collect our language to put away on shelves and now in databases. I want it to *live*. Things gathered are only stored for short amounts of time to always be used later and never to just *have*. For example, all of the language I gather from Wha:dichwing I teach to other teachers, to family members, and to youth in the community. My responsibility to both my aunt and to the language-gathering approach necessitates that I use this knowledge rather than keep it for myself or just write a paper about it. Respecting and reciprocating relationships are central to the knowledge-gathering approach.

Sources of 'O:lts'it, Knowledge

The first source of knowledge that we drew from were k'iwinya'n-ya:n (*people*). This knowledge-gathering process took place in conjunction with the Hoopa Valley Tribal community, *my* community. This included the tribal education department, the Hupa Language Project, Hupa language teachers, speakers, elders, students, and community members at large. Official permission and approval for this particular inquiry project was sought and given by the Hoopa Tribal Education Association. To my knowledge, my dissertation was only the second dissertation project to have sought out or received official permission to conduct this work from a Hoopa Valley tribal entity, despite the fact that many research projects have been carried out in our community. This speaks to the history of and ongoing legacy of researchers doing work on Hoopa without our permission.

Overall, I worked with approximately seventy-five community members, meaning I had a conversation with them, they participated in planning meetings, or they participated in a camp. It was highly unrealistic to expect that all of these people I worked with would take part in all aspects of the project, especially given that I only had resources for minimal amounts of compensation. I had conversations with fifty people between the ages of five and eighty-five. Some of these people I only spoke to once; others I've spoken to more times than I can remember in both official and unofficial conversations. I worked most consistently with employees of the Hoopa Tribal Education Association and its programs, the Hoopa Tribal Afterschool Program, and Nohoł-diniLa:y-dig Niwho:*ngxw*, to łe:ne:tł'-te (*plan*) and conduct the three ye-silin camps. We also worked extensively with language teachers Danny Ammon, Jackie Martins, and Wha:dichwing Verdena Parker to gather and learn language and to plan and run the camps. We paid them for their work either through program budgets or grants that I was able to attain for their expert knowledge. Last, we conducted three *ye*-silin camps with a total of forty-five children and their families: one in July 2018, one in April 2019, and the last in July 2019. Some children were able to attend all

three camps. Given that I interacted with certain people much more than others, including language teachers, ye-silin camp teachers from the Hoopa tribal education department, and members of my family (and had much more established relationships with them), you will hear their words quite a bit. However, although you may not get to see direct quotes from every person I worked with, that doesn't mean that their words were not vital to the project and the praxis we conducted. In the spirit of gathering and creating from what one has gathered, there are limits to what can be used for one project. This doesn't mean that the other things gathered will go to waste; rather, they will be saved and used for something else down the line. I look forward to, and have, revisited and continued to build from this work and the plethora of knowledge that I was able to gather.

Following the conversations I had with community members, they would be asked if they wanted to participate in other aspects of the project such as the planning meetings and camps. Although I did not expect them to participate in all other aspects of the project, I most definitely wanted to leave the invitation open if they *did* want to. We need as many people for this work as we can get with all of their unique skills and gifts that they bring. I would consistently check in with my collaborators at the Hoopa Tribal Education Association about my progress with the project and the aspect of the project that was most pertinent at that time, such as an upcoming camp, at least once a month. This group increased over time, and we shifted from working solely on an autonomous immersion camp to working with the afterschool program to put on a camp of its own, and to use what we had developed in the summer camp with the students they had each day. We also wanted to continue with the same (age) group of students we had been working with during the previous two years so that we stayed consistent with another July camp with this group. Participants in the camp were selected by their families through an application process done through the education association.

The second source of knowledge that we drew from was xine:wh (*language*). As many of my collaborators noted, Na:tinixwe mixine:whe is vital to our being as Na:tinixwe, Hupa people. These words, this language was given to us by our spirit ancestors to understand and communicate with this world that they created for us as Na:tinixwe. As collaborator Kishan Lara-Cooper notes, "Language connects all [traditional teachings]. We may not remember specific teachings, but when we look at the language and we start to translate language, that kind of guides us into how to *be*. So, that's an essential tool to connecting all of those things together." One of our six-year-old students in our post-camp conversations stated, "I want to learn the language because this is where I was born." He understood the importance of the language to who we are and where we are from, and he wants others to learn as well for the future of our people. Another child around the same age stated, "It's very important to learn our language again." The words of even our youngest among us are crucial to listen to and take seriously, and it was so wonderful to have these conversations with them.

I had to continually gather language knowledge to conduct the ye-silin camps and conceptualize our inquiry approaches. For our camps, we would first plan out what activities we wanted to do, then we elicited relevant language from Wha:dichwing

Verdena and learned that language well enough to teach the other teachers, all so that, by the time of the camp, we were ready to teach the students. Language-learning, teaching, and planning would all take place simultaneously. In my writing I don't always have the words, but I gather and use as much as I can. I have to make room for my mistakes. When I wrote my dissertation proposal, I didn't have the correct language. I may not even have it now—but I'm getting there. In our language work with Na:tinixwe youth, we encouraged students to make mistakes and hold space for growth. I know that they will be my teachers one day. I gathered language from my Aunt Verdena and my other mentor teacher, K'ilajonde', to share with others. This was *not* language documentation. This was language resurgence: learn, share, teach, repeat. This was *not* elicitation, documentation, or archiving. Even if we may have done some things that looked similar to those things along the way, the priority remained reconnecting—people, language, and the land. Even as I write, I am still gathering the correct words to use. I went from whina:lt'e' to łe:k'iwhlaw 'o:lts'it; the method being to change and adapt as I went along, as I learned and as I gathered.

Ninis'a:n (*the land*) and its many plants, animals, and other beings were the third key source of knowledge for this project. Na:tinixwe scholar Byron Nelson writes, "Hupa land contained many resources, and there was much to learn." Na:tinixw, the Hoopa Valley, our homelands contain all that we need as Na:tinixwe people to survive and live a good life. Nelson describes Na:tinixw: "Beyond the coastal mountains of northwestern California, the Trinity River runs through a rich valley which has always been the center of the Hupa world, the place where the trails return." Ninis'a:n in Na:tinixwe mixine:whe means many different things: it can be used to describe the ground, the mountains, sacred country, the earth, and the world. It is everything. As Nelson describes, it was also key to the education systems of our people: learn the land and take care of it and it will continue to take care of you. Indigenous communities across the world have different relationships with the land, but one thing that seems to be common across all of our communities is that we *have a relationship* with the land. It is not there for us to simply exploit and use at our convenience as it is in capitalist societies. The land is not something to be owned; it is its own being that exists for itself. We are grateful for any gifts that the land provides for us, and we show this gratitude through our relationship with it.

In Na:tinixwe mixine:whe there is no way to say that you own a certain portion of land. There is no way to express land as property. When you want to talk about land and one's relationship to it, you use the phrase *ninis'a:n-whohłts'it*, which has two translations. The first: *I know the land*; the other is the more literal translation: *the land knows me*. This means that within a Na:tinixwe epistemology, the land is its own being with the ability to know or know things, and, in this case, to know *people*. This demonstrates the reciprocal relationship that one must maintain to know the land and for the land to know you. The land knows, but it can also not know you if you don't maintain that relationship. Łe:k'iwhlaw 'o:lts'it (*knowledge-gathering*), as the guiding methodology of this inquiry project, is also very much about maintaining relationships, even more so than I have done in the past. Through this process I have pushed myself to maintain a meaningful relationship with ninis'a:n and produce curriculum

for our ye-silin camps that created opportunities for the youth to develop and maintain this relationship as well.

Different Approaches to Gathering

In order to undertake this project, I conducted a three-part process of ch'idilwa:wh (*conversations*), łe:ne:tł'-te (meetings), and ye-silin (*re-envisioning praxis camps*). These three methods guided the knowledge-gathering for this inquiry project. Each methodological approach focused on a specific process within the research. I drew from three sources of knowledge to guide this work: k'iwinya'n-ya:n (*people*), ninisa:n (*land and other beings*), and xine:wh (*language*). Each method drew from these sources of knowledge in different ways at different moments.

Ch'idilwa:wh, or my conversational methodological approach, focused on listening and learning. I wanted to reject the language of interview in łe:k'iwhlaw 'o:lts'it. Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley (where I did my graduate work), have been interviewing Hupa people for more than a century. These researchers made their careers off the words of Hupa people. After the project was over, the people and the community were left with little to nothing to show for it. Interviews conducted by researchers in my community have often been a heavily one-sided, colonial endeavor, in which researchers ask their questions and take Hupa knowledge, but the community does not benefit from the work. I did not wish to undertake that kind of research within this inquiry project. When talking with collaborators, I undertook the Indigenous method of conversations in place of the language of "conducting interviews."

With this approach I am not simply asking questions but often expanding upon what I am saying from my position as a community member with equal investment in the answer. Our shared experiences and knowledge base of being members in the same community provide for a much deeper and more meaningful exchange of ideas than if I were an outsider. There are so many surface-level things, things that would need explaining in another type of situation, that we can simply skip over and get into the heart of the issues at hand. Last, given the cyclical nature of the knowledge-gathering, I was also able to bring into our conversations some of the knowledge gathered from the youth we worked with to ensure we were honoring their important contributions.

Below is an excerpt from a conversation I had with two of our ye-silin teachers following one of our camps:

> **Whidehch (Me)**: Every single kid that I talked to said they didn't like bullying at school, and that they liked that everything is good here.
>
> **Xutł'e'dung'-xa:sina:wh**: Awww.
>
> **Jena:h**: Right, like, none of the kids or adults, 'cause I feel like at the school, adults do that—like they were making fun of other kids. Like, if they didn't say something right or if they were forgetting, ya know? No one was like, "Ha-ha-ha, you said it wrong," or . . .

Xutl'e'dung'-xa:sina:wh: Yeah, none of the kids did that to each other . . .

Jena:h: No, not that I noticed.

Xutl'e'dung'-xa:sina:wh: 'Cause sometimes the kids [at school] are like, "I know what five plus five is. You don't know that?"

Jena:h: Whereas, if they knew more *here*, they were helping . . .

Xutl'e'dung'-xa:sina:wh: Yeah, they didn't do any of that negative stuff. I'm so proud, because that happens when a kid knows more than another kid, like, they'll show it—but these guys, none of them *did* that. They were all very supportive of each other, very positive. That's what I liked the most.

Here we can see a back-and-forth exchange made casual through our already established relationships. While growing up, Je:nah and Xutl'e'dung'-xa:sina:wh were very close friends of Wha:t (*my older sister*), and that's one of the reasons I gained the name Whidehch. This Na:tinixwe-based inquiry process of knowledge-gathering allowed us to really explore our ideas and critiques of what was in place and what we wanted for our youth. Last and most important, it allowed us to join those ideas with those of our youth and put them into action. In this particular example, we were then able to continue and expand upon our approaches to creating a positive learning environment in which everyone—teachers, students, language, and land—felt supported.

The Hupa word for conversation is ch'idilwa:wh (*they are conversing*). However, what is most important is that the root of this word, dilwa:wh, can be used to describe any communication taking place among not just people but virtually all other living things, from birds singing to frogs croaking. The birds surely have just as much to teach us, and we can teach one another. Ch'idilwa:wh is a serious decentering of humans as the only producers of knowledge. For example, the call and circular flying patterns of a buzzard can tell us that something or someone is either hurt, dying, or dead. Through this method, I take such messages very seriously and incorporate them into the writing and praxis in appropriate ways.

These conversations with k'iwinya'n-ya:n (*people*) were done by reaching out to as many Na:tinixwe as I could through personal connections, formal events, social media, and whatever other ways might emerge. Although it was unrealistic to expect all k'iwinya'n-ya:n that I had contacted to participate in the other steps of the process, ch'idilwa:wh as a method was to make sure that all of their voices are heard in the project. I conducted conversations with community members to gather the knowledge they were willing to share with me for this project. Some of this knowledge is written here, other aspects of this knowledge were put into action with Na:tinixwe youth, and other parts were too sacred to be shared at all.

Theoretically, ch'idilwa:wh sounds like a powerful disruption of the often-extractive interviewing process that has been used in the community for more than 100 years. In fact, many people that I had conversations with told me that other outside researchers had asked them to be interviewed about similar topics in the recent past. I then asked if they knew what was going to be done with those interviews. They responded that

they didn't know and related to me that, when this happened in the past, they never heard from those researchers again. This pattern is most definitely *not* what I wanted to replicate. However, similar to the problem of the language of "data collection," when I sought out collaborators to take part in the inquiry process, I asked if they wanted to be interviewed so they would know it was formal and not just to visit. Although ch'idilwa:wh was my goal, it was very hard to maintain this within the confines of the university Institutional Review Board framework. This is why I am pushing for ch'idilwa:wh, or an adapted version for specific communities, so that maybe somewhere down the line that language will be recognized at some point, even if it isn't just yet. How does the history of research in the community keep showing up in my work, even though I'm trying to do everything I can to make it different? This was a question I continually asked myself throughout this process. I don't want to do an interview, but the term *interview* signals research, and I don't want to act like I'm not doing research and then have my collaborators feel as if they were deceived. Brayboy and Deyhle write about how being a good Indigenous relation sometimes means being a bad researcher and vice versa.[1] I want to think of a research approach where this dichotomy does not have to exist. All I can do here is aim to change things for future Na:tinixwe wanting to gather knowledge and build for our people.

My process in conducting these conversations changed and adapted to my collaborators as I went. The reflexivity that I practiced in relation to my process and my conversations pushed me to be as accountable to those I was working with and learning from as I could. For example, I knew that my questions were very capacious, to the point where one could be confused or get lost within one. Therefore, I started to give my collaborators a printed abstract of the project as well as the questions I was going to ask, broken down so that they could reference them alongside our conversations. We could then both write notes when the other was speaking to comment on what they were saying and bring it up after they were finished instead of interrupting the person speaking. This also had some drawbacks as this method could guide the conversation in a much more strict and constraining way than I had previously desired, but there is no perfect procedure. People really didn't like to be recorded, and I understood and respected that. It invokes a certain amount of anxiety about the finality of the words that you say on a recorder and how your voice becomes disembodied. This is especially true given the extractive history of research in our community.

This is why I moved away from use of the recorder in some of my conversations, while still seeing the value in it. The priority was the comfort of my collaborators and the kids, not the writing and accurate quotes. There were often times I could have pushed and asked questions or even used personal information that I knew about my collaborators to go deeper into conversations and get into topics that my collaborators were perhaps intentionally staying away from. I think some of my academic training has taught me that, but I refuse it here because it doesn't actually help anyone or anything. Even though in our conversations we were talking about education, collaborators would constantly and repeatedly bring into the discourse strings of traumatic events that happened inside and out of the school setting. I even found myself turning off the tape recorder at times. Collaborators have asked and expressed the following

sentiments: *What are you going to do with this? Do you have to turn this in to your advisor? You won't present this will you? Please just let me know if you use a quote because someone used a quote I said once and I would have liked to have seen it before it was published.* An important part of ch'idilwa:wh is to be reflexive and responsive to the desires of my collaborators.

Ch'idilwa:wh, conversations, were primarily conducted in one-on-one settings either at the tribal education facilities, after camp at the campsite, in people's homes, or in the location of their choosing. I tried to accommodate their schedules and locations as much as I could. I had a set list of guiding questions and topics going into these conversations, but I also tried to let them unfold as organically as possible. One key difference that I see between conversations and interviews is that I also have a stake in the topic we are discussing. I am not asking for information for an intellectual project as an outsider (who may or may not come back); rather, I want us to construct something for the sake of *our* youth, *our* community. Some conversations were conducted with families as a whole at the collaborator's request. For example, I was supposed to speak to a mother of a student of the camp, but her daughters and husband were in and out of the house at the time, so I was able to speak with all of them.

Łe:ne:tł'-te: Land, Language, and People

Between conducting conversations with community members and conducting the ye-silin camps, we had to undertake a great deal of planning and preparing to put the knowledge gathered from the conversations into action. I am calling these meetings łe:ne:tł'-te (*we'll come together, meet*). Within these meetings, primarily conducted with members of the Hoopa Tribal Education Association staff (although they were open to all who had participated in the project), we would plan the camps, conduct language trainings, and develop curriculum. During our camps, we would meet at the end of each day to debrief and plan for the next day. On the last day we would talk about how we might improve future camps and discuss our visions for the long term. Following the end of the knowledge-gathering process, these meetings turned into accountability check-ins for myself to the community in sharing the ideas that I write here. Although there were only three camps within the scope of this particular project, we also continue to plan camps and put into effect the knowledge gathered here.

These łe:ne:tł'-te meetings also brought together the three sources of knowledge: language, land, and people. The content of the meetings would vary based on what project we had coming up next. I would help with other events and programs that weren't within the scope of the particular inquiry project to maintain a reciprocal relationship with my collaborators. For example, there was a community education meeting, so I volunteered as a note taker. In one meeting, we would be playing language games, in another we would be ordering food, and in another we would go out and gather the materials we needed for the next camp. It was not by design, but we always ended up talking about how bad the school is. At one meeting, one collaborator was telling us about a student literally running away from the school and then being chased down by administrators in a car.

These conversations were constant reminders of the urgency of the work, yet also of the limitations of my capacity to do anything because I did not live there at that time. As I mentioned in my opening, I knew once I started this work that I had to maintain those relationships and be accountable to my collaborators. Now, whenever we organize an event with youth or collaborators, we make sure that we can follow up with them in another series of events in the community, informally or otherwise. However, that still did not seem like enough with all of the horror stories I was hearing about what was going on with our youth. Yet, as educators at Wicoie Nandagikendan remind us, sometimes we need to take a slower pace to make the meaningful changes we are hoping for in our work.

In one of my favorite meetings, we went to scope out the campground where we would be conducting camp. We wanted to see what plants, animals, and other beings we could have the students identify as an activity. We identified them both by their English and Na:tinixwe mixine:whe names. Then we went to a different location to find traditional foods to serve at our parent lunch on the last day of camp. I had personally never gathered these traditional foods before, so I was excited to learn. We gathered some nahst'ik (*Indian tea*). We also wanted to gather some xoji' yinehtaw (*Indian potatoes*), but we found that they were not ready yet. We used the principles of gathering that I had put forth above and we were able to learn from one another. This is the essence of łe:ne:tł'-te. I decided to use the future tense of this word, because I hope that we will always continue to come together in this way for many years to come.

Łe:ne:tł'-te, *coming together*, was conducted with ninisa:n and other Na:tinixwe. Through these reconnections with the land, we planned out the curriculum and trained for the upcoming camps that took place in the form of ye-silin in praxis. The process of remembering is to purposefully bring all three sources of knowledge together that colonialism tried to break apart, to *dis*member. In this way, we strengthen the collective knowledge by once again bringing together k'iwinya'n-ya:n, ninisa:n, and Na:tinixwe mixine:whe. From this knowledge, we can *re*-envision a better education and better lives for our youth. We are stronger and smarter together. We disrupt the settler colonial paradigm that knowledge is produced individually. We are the girls at the end of the story, putting Coyote back together, putting the *world* back together.

Ye-silin: Re-envisioning in Praxis

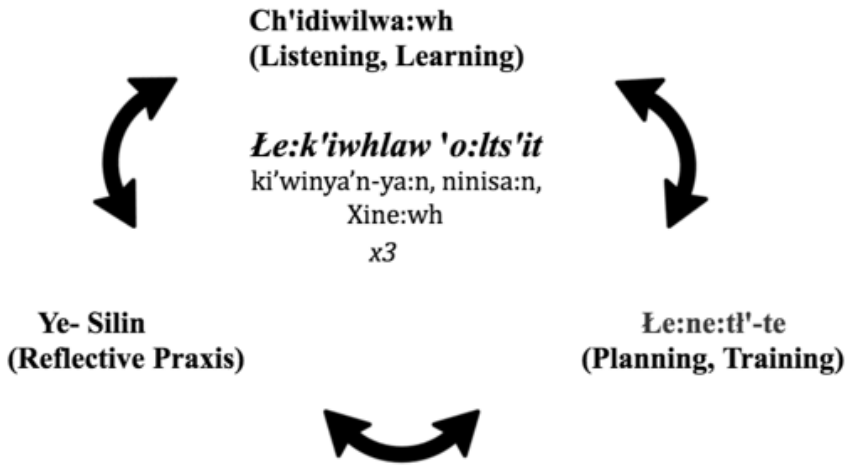
Ye-silin (*we see it come into being*) or re-envisioning as a method was a reflexive praxis of the knowledge gathered via all the ch'idwilwa:wh (*conversations*) and łe:ne:tł'-te (*meetings*). This manifested in three consecutive camps with Na:tinixwe youth. They took into account all of the knowledge, learning, and planning done in each methodological approach before it. They drew on the knowledge gained from k'iwinya'n-ya:n, ninisa:n, and xine:wh. During these camps, I was a facilitator and teacher as well as a participant observer. These camps, along with the other two research procedures, aimed to contest colonial relations of power, envision a type of education for Na:tinixwe youth outside of these power relations, and then live out these relations through the three

programs. Although I aimed to perform the three approaches to my methodology in sequence—conversations, meetings, and praxis—resulting in three cycles of each approach, in reality the undertaking of such was much less linear. However, this was a good thing overall, in that it was a much more organic process that was adaptive to the needs of the community and my specific collaborators.

The first weeklong camp took place in July 2018, the second was a three-day camp that took place in April 2019, and the final was a four-day camp that took place in July 2019. These were camps of Na:tinixwe Mixine:whe resurgence. Ye-silin as reflexive praxis brings the visions seen in our individual minds through ch'idilwa:wh and manifested into collective consciousness through łe:ne:tł'-te and puts them into action together. These three procedures—ch'idilwa:wh, łe:ne:tł'-te, and ye-silin—were performed in rounds, in order. Although I aimed to run these procedures in a cyclical manner, the timing in practice was much messier than one after another; rather, the process would unfold based on what and who was available in those moments, and what made the most sense in that time and place. What was most important about this process, however, was that as I moved from procedure to procedure, I would strive to improve each of the ways that I approached them, most specifically with the youth in the ye-silin camps. No perfect process exists, but there is always room for growth and renewal.

Ye-silin (*re-envisioning*) is key to answering our questions in meaningful and transformative ways, and is the last tenet put forth here for łe:k'iwhlaw 'o:lts'it (*knowledge-gathering*). This politics of resistance is something that has continued to ensure our survival as Na:tinixwe today and for future generations. Although I am the first scholar to articulate each of these methods in this way, conversing, remembering, and envisioning have been processes Na:tinixwe have been undertaking since time immemorial. The collective voice I use is to signal that I am not an authoritative researcher within the project but rather just one part of ye-silin. The graphic below shows the multidirectional, cyclical interplay between ch'idilwa:wh, łe:ne:tł'-te, and ye-silin, with łe:k'iwhlaw 'o:lts'it being the overarching project and method.

This inquiry project followed these multidirectional cycles of these three procedures to move toward a rebuilding of the Na:tinixwe educational structure for Na:tinixwe youth. I chose the number three for its significance in Na:tinixwe epistemology. For us, three is a powerful, meaningful number. For example, in ceremonies one sings a song three times. Through this process of listening, learning, planning, training, and reflexive praxis, these re-envisioned programs for Na:tinixwe youth began to take form. Teachers were trained. Students were recruited. Curriculum, pedagogy, and structure were created. This is not the beginning of this process, as there have been many other Na:tinixwe education and language resurgence projects before this, not to mention the thousands of years before colonialism in which Na:tinixwe educated our youth in our own way.



Łe:k'iwhlaw 'o:lts'it (*knowledge-gathering*) as our Na:tinixwe approach to Community-Based Inquiry gave us the opportunity to ask the most important questions to members of our community and engage in the process of answering them in meaningful and transformative ways. We were able to create a norm within our work to continue to engage in conversations and reflective meetings and to then put all the knowledge gathered into praxis with each new program that we conducted. The impact of the empowering inquiry was felt immediately and consistently, with the realization that our ancestral knowledge would lead us to solutions to issues in our communities.

Community-Based Inquiry across Communities

Community-Based Inquiry into early childhood education in our own communities is so important, but it can also be exhausting and isolating. Sometimes it can feel like it's just you and a small group of folks doing the work. One of the most empowering and enlightening things our group of teachers found when we need to re-energize is to look at what other communities have done and how they did it. Each community has its own unique challenges and approaches to Community-Based Inquiry, founded on the ancestral knowledge of their people and place. At the same time, we do share a history of colonial impositions in our communities, so there are also lots of similarities. When we are able to learn from each other, we are also able to rebuild networks of love and care across time and space. We need to remind each other that we are not alone in this hard work, and it is so important that it continues. I will now reflect on just some of the many important connections and lessons I have learned from the work of the community educators in this special issue, most specifically those from Wicoie Nandagikendan.

I opened this article with words from my teacher, Whadichwing Verdena Parker. Through our countless language-gathering sessions in preparation for our immersion camps, she helped me to conceptualize our knowledge-gathering inquiry process. In addition, the kids that we worked with, gathering on the land together in the language we shared, proved the worth of our Community-Based Inquiry approach. I made sure to prioritize their voices in our conversations and take their feedback into account for any programs we did with them. I feel similar connections reading about the work of Wicoie Nandagikendan: "It's important to look back and give credit to our community. We would not be here without the children who are central to our work." They open their piece by giving credit to those who have come before them, then dedicating it to those who will come after. Placing themselves within the broader lineage of ancestors who have been doing this work since time immemorial is so significant, and something I saw across all of the articles.

Through the process of contributing to this special issue, I had the great privilege of actually getting to meet Jewell Arcoren and Fawn YoungBear-Tibbetts of Wicoie Nandagikendan. They welcomed me and my family into their office with open arms. They were willing and eager to answer our questions. We were able to skip the usual preamble about how important our work was and just get right into the important details of the praxis. Through their piece and our time together, I learned you have to do this work and keep it moving forward even when it's not under ideal conditions. If the children are healthy and learning the language, that's what is most important. They write, "There is a direct connection between language immersion and our community's health and wellbeing." While they directly serve a certain number of children, the impacts of their work are felt intergenerationally and across physical and spiritual spaces.

At the same time, I've also learned this from their work: for the children to be well, we need to be well ourselves. I know that wellness is central to Community-Based Inquiry in Indigenous communities. They continue: "We also realized that we were not necessarily taking the best care of ourselves, either. Most of the time I run on autopilot, and often I don't have time to decompress. Time and space for healing and reflection then became very important to the questions we were asking." This is such a simple but profound recognition of the ways that we must not only center the well-being of those who we work for, the children, but also of ourselves in all the work that we do. I look forward to taking this approach in my own work in my own community, as I know that we are in great need of this healing as well.

In my opening paragraphs I relayed that in my own and in many other Indigenous communities, the existence of obstacles in our daily lives as well as the residue of colonial trauma means we may not have the opportunity to stop, reflect, and ask important questions through a Community-Based Inquiry process. However, Wicoie Nandagikendan gives us the action plan to not only stop and ask but begin to answer such questions in ways that promote healing, moving us from "a space of scarcity and survival to a space of thriving and love." They write, "We also realized that we could hold some of this space now, even though we are not in our own physical space." Their approach to Community-Based Inquiry is to create metaphysical spaces of wellness in

the ways of our ancestors, which is something that doesn't require physical space or consistent funding but rather relationships and intention.

Reading these articles, so carefully put together by these Community-Based Inquiry teams, has been enlightening. I could see so many connections across all of the highs and lows they describe. I know we have felt those in my community as well. As I was reading, I could truly feel the passion and intention that these educators bring to the work in their communities. These intentions are guided by our ancestors. I look forward to continuing to return to these articles over and over again to hear important lessons my community may need in our work as we continue to expand.

I am relatively young in this work, so learning from others who have been at this for much longer is truly valuable. In continuing to understand my role as an academic researcher and all of the balancing that comes with these articles, I am allowed the opportunity to own my role as a member of my community and my family, and as a descendant of my ancestors, first and foremost. This special issue has provided an opportunity to enter conversations about what is most important to me and those that I have worked with at a deep and transformative level that I don't often get. Sometimes it feels like we are spending so much precious time convincing others how important the work is rather than getting to a place of how to do it and do it well. The articles in this special issue give us the chance to skip all of the convincing and get into the work, to learn, troubleshoot, reflect, and get different perspectives on how to continue. For that I am extremely grateful. Ts'ehdiyah.

Notes

1. Bryan McKinley Brayboy and Donna Deyhle, "Insider-Outsider: Researchers in American Indian Communities," *Theory into Practice* 39, no. 3 (2000): 163–69.