

Indigenous Futurities in Curriculum

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WE OPEN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE with an exercise that brings our ancestors and us together as we engage our thinking and action around Indigenous futurities in curriculum. We ask, “What land or water do you carry with you today? Who do you bring with you?”¹

I (Hollie) carry with me, Tsoodzil. This is one of the sacred mountains of the Diné that is located between Gallup and Albuquerque, New Mexico. My mother and matrilineal line is from an area west of Tsoodzil. I bring Tsoodzil with me because it represents home. When I travel from Pennsylvania to home, it is the first thing I look for to let me know I am near. The sacred mountains of the Diné orient the people and provide direction. They have existed before our human existence and continue to guide us. The mountains are one representation that we can look to, to know that Diné futurity has already been set in motion, the knowledge, tools, and instructions have already been set out for us.

I (Leilani) carry with me my homelands in Cirniq (Chignik) and my sister’s homelands in Falasteen (Palestine)—places that are connected through our relationship with one another and through remembrance, inheritance, and imagination. Cirniq is a place and community I was able to reconnect with as an adoptee through acts of remembering and imagining. Several lines from a poem by Koyukon Athabascan poet Mary TallMountain (2005)— “I tell you now. You can go home again” (p. 13)—sparked a feeling, a memory, a hope, and ultimately, a future in which I was reconnected to the place my ancestors have always known, a place our grandmother left to attend a Baptist Mission school, a place colonialism sought to sever me from unsuccessfully. Carrying Cirniq with me reminds me that our histories, our imaginations, and the work we do in the present to realize the futures we want to be a part of are all vital to Indigenous futurity work. My sister has yet to visit Cirniq, but that future is already present in the stories and photos I share with her, and she will remember them when she returns. Because I am writing amidst genocide, I also carry with me Falasteen, a place my sister Lena both remembers and imagines, a place her grandmother was violently dispossessed from at the age of 8, a place that also exists in LA because she carries her roots and memories with her. Her existence and steadfastness are the seeds of presence and resistance that will realize her right of return in the future. Her determination, embodied by so

many Palestinians who say to themselves—“I am Palestinian, and because I am Palestinian, Palestine has a future” (Al-Emleh, 2022, n.p.)—also reflects vital and vibrant futurity work in motion. Some day she will take me there so that we can remember the place her grandmother and ancestors have known and cherished for generations. These places I am carrying with me today are thousands of miles away from us and from each other, and also as close as an embrace, a memory, and a dream.

Nu Tuukwa yan Hopi maatsiwa, nu Hospoawungwa niikyangw nu Sistomongaqw. My name is Jeremy Garcia, and my Hopi name is Tuukwa (derived from paternal affiliations with the Tobacco and Rabbit clans). I am from the Hopi village of Sitsomovi and of the Hospoawungwa (Roadrunner) clan. The lands, water, and relations I carry with me are rooted across Hopitutskwa (Hopi ancestral lands, Arizona). As a Hopi, I carry stories of emergence associated with Sipapuni—a physical and sacred site located in Öngtupqa (settler colonialism renamed this as the Grand Canyon). In our stories, it is stated that, as the Hopi entered this fourth world, they met Máasaw. Hopi Elder, Kuwanwisiwma (2002) shares, “As clan after clan emerged to this world, each was challenged to commit itself to a life plan that was dictated by the guardian deity, who Hopis know as Máasaw” (p. 161). As Hopi, we/I continue to sustain our covenant with Máasaw by living a life as stewards of the earth and maintaining cultural and ceremonial lifeways associated with dry farming. Within our stories of emergence, clans were instructed to mark their journey by leaving “footprints” (i.e., petroglyphs, shrines, etc.) that symbolized their presence and stewardship of the lands. The lands and waters I carry with me embody relations to this spiritual covenant which continues to inform our Hopi futurities as stewards of the land.

Indigenous Futurities in Curriculum Theory

We begin this issue by sharing the diverse lands, waters, and relations that we bring with us. Evident in our opening narratives, our relations to these lands and waters realign and connect us with our ancestors. Just as Indigenous lands and communities are diverse, so too are Indigenous futurities in education and beyond. In her article on rematriating curriculum studies, Unanga scholar Eve Tuck (2011) foregrounds rematriation as an important framework for upending settler colonialism in curriculum studies. Rematriating here means returning lands, attending to the significance of land in curriculum, as well as “the redistribution of power, knowledge, and place, and the dismantling of settler colonialism” (p. 37). As Tuck offers, “When curriculum studies are rematriated, alternative aims of curriculum in communities begin to surface” (p. 35), and in this issue, we connect diverse futurity work to these alternative aims. Curriculum theorizing that begins from specific Indigenous lands and waters as vital and diverse systems of relationality has the potential to upend settler colonialism and support Indigenous futurity.

Refusing Erasure and Replacement

This special issue takes its direction from Eve Tuck and Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández’s (2013) foundational article, “Curriculum, Replacement, and Settler Futurity” published in this journal. In it, they were explicit that the field of curriculum studies is complicit in settler colonialism and that curriculum can explicitly or inadvertently “reinscribe settler colonialism and settler futurity” (p. 73). Settler colonialism is a structure rooted in the elimination of Indigenous

lands and lives (Wolfe, 2006) and intent on extinguishing Indigenous peoples’ “historical, epistemological, philosophical, moral and political claims to the land” (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 74). Describing settler futurity, they offered that “Anything that seeks to recuperate and not interrupt settler colonialism, to reform the settlement and incorporate Indigenous peoples into the multicultural settler colonial nation state is fettered to settler futurity” (p. 80). Understood in this context, the field of curriculum studies, in its early, contemporary, and even critical iterations, can be thought of as a *curriculum project of replacement* (p. 75) if it does not actively work to interrupt settler colonialism and settler futurities.

This special issue creates space for those countering settler futurities and those invested in cultivating Indigenous futurities to share with and learn from one another. As Smith (2021) notes, “What is more important than what alternatives Indigenous peoples offer the world is what alternatives Indigenous peoples offer each other” (p. 121). By Indigenous futurities, we mean futures in which Indigenous lands, languages, and lifeways thrive. As Indigenous communities and scholars have shown us, Indigenous futurities are not only in the future, but are being practiced and seeded now. Our Indigenous existence is already set in motion. It has already been and is being prayed about, spiritually constructed as it has been and told and reaffirmed through creation and emergence stories. Indigenous futurities exist despite settler colonial practices of erasure. We view the work of interrupting settler futurities and nurturing Indigenous futurities as intimately interrelated.

In thinking through the politics of interrupting settler futurities, anticolonial scholar Leigh Patel (2016) invites us to ask, “if the futures we imagine, if the learning we want to create space for, animates or interrupts settler logics” and whether the possible futurities we are mapping are “settler or decolonial” (p. 95). As Indigenous educators, we must continually reflect on whether the types of futurity work we are engaged in centers Indigenous values and systems of relationality or aligns with settler logics and practices of erasure. Interrupting settler futurities requires a corresponding effort to imagine and enact decolonial and Indigenous futurities. Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua (2019) describes futurities as, “ways that groups imagine and produce knowledge about futures” (p. 86). Futurity is not a simple thought about what the future might look like, but rather deeply implicates the styles of thinking about the future, the types of practices that give content to a certain future, and the logics behind how present actions are legitimized or guided by specific futures (Anderson, 2010 as cited in Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2019). Indigenous futurities refuse to see conquest as inevitable and, instead, imagine and actively work toward a present and future in which Indigenous peoples, lands, and lifeways thrive. Indigenous futurity work in curriculum studies requires thinking about the types of curriculum theorizing and practice we must engage in now, to realize Indigenous futurities.

In this special issue, we invited contributors who engage in Indigenous futurity work in education without the need for settler justification. We intentionally invited contributions that refused to center or “soothe settler anxieties” (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 86). We invited Indigenous scholars and community members to share how their theories and practices of curriculum support Indigenous lifeways, knowledges, and languages. We also welcomed scholars who are committed and who “hold one another accountable,” to refuse settler futurities in curriculum. We invited contributions that center decolonial, anticolonial, and Indigenous curriculum theorizing and practices that contribute to sustaining Indigenous futurities.

In response, we received a range of papers that share theory and practices committed to Indigenous futurities in curriculum studies. We have framed these contributions in three sections. The first, highlights Indigenous lands, languages, and epistemologies as the basis of renewal and

Indigenous futurities. The cycle of renewal reminds us that there is always time and space to reassert Indigenous theory and practices in curriculum studies that support Indigenous futurity. The papers in the second section attend to the complicated work of countering settler futurities and creating space for Indigenous futurities within and against the grain of dominant disciplines, such as social studies and computer science. The final section returns to Indigenous futurity work as a process of renewal and realignment with Indigenous ways of knowing and being, this time within early childhood learning in the context of land-based education and through Indigenous nation/community and university partnering to create character building curriculum.

Section 1: Indigenous Lands, Languages, and Epistemologies as the Basis of Renewal and Indigenous Futurities

We open this issue with “Towards Curriculum of Renewal: Na:tinixwe Approaches From/For the Language, Land, and People” by Sara Chase Merrick (Hupa), which offers a Hupa framing for how Indigenous futurity is constantly renewed through ceremony and the everydayness of Hupa ways of knowing. Merrick describes their renewal ceremony as a part of the cyclical processes of their existence. Here, the “daily acts of embodying and living Indigeneity, honoring longstanding relationships with the land and with one another” become important ways of embodying Hupa renewal and nurturing Indigenous futurity, highlighting how the everyday actions of “individual Indigenous people, families, and communities often go unacknowledged but are no less vital to decolonial processes” (Hunt & Holmes, 2015, pp. 157–158). Indigenous futurity, which is deeply intertwined with our histories and legacies, is always considered in the present and lived by the original instructions of our ancestors. Hupa people persist towards their continued existence with intention, knowing that their renewal ceremonies provide time and space to reflect and reorient towards Hupa livelihood in a sacred way. Merrick’s framing of renewal serves to anchor the cycle of articles in this special issue, highlighting the cyclical nature of life and social change and the reality that the Indigenous values, languages, lifeways, and processes needed to nurture Indigenous futurities already exist and are there, waiting for us to connect/reconnect with them.

Section 2: Countering Settler Futurities and Reclaiming Space for Indigenous Futurities

While the previous section anchors the special issue in the idea of renewal and the cyclical nature of life, this section demonstrates how settler colonialism’s persistence works to break the cycles that ensure an Indigenous existence. Sage Hatch (Siletz) and Jerry Rosiek’s article, “Agency and Counter-Agency in Curriculum Studies: Teacher Work Against the Grain of Settler Futurities,” documents the persistent and “tricky” dynamics of settler colonialism in K-12 public schools and how teaching for Indigenous futurity must encompass more than the efforts of individual teachers working against the grain of settler futurity. Located in a high school in his own Tribal community, Hatch reflects on the ways settler colonialism mediated the anticolonial teaching he had hoped to engage with Indigenous students. The stories of deflection, surveillance, resistance, and support of a curriculum unit he created underscore the active, dynamic, and shape-shifting nature of settler colonialism, including settler erasure and replacement (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) that continues to structure settler schooling and curriculum.

Teaching against the grain of settler futurities and in service of Indigenous futurities will require that teachers do more than “include” Indigenous histories and experiences in their curricula; they must engage in an equally active and dynamic process of resisting settler colonialism. They argue that the “complicated practical politics of teaching against the grain of settler colonialism should be acknowledged and addressed in teacher education programs” (p. 32) an insight that implicates not only mainstream teacher education programs, but given Hatch’s experiences as an Indigenous teacher, highlights responsibilities for those leading Indigenous teacher education programs as well. Further, teachers must also become involved in relational networks to help them “sustain a practice” of refusing settler colonialism in schools.

Cueponcaxochitl Moreno Sandoval (Nahautl) starts her article, “Ancestral Computing for Sustainability: Learning From Indigenous Mothering While (Re)Birthing Computing Education Towards Indigenous Futurities,” with a heartfelt letter to her son that expresses and embodies the love, hope, and careful considerations that Indigenous Mothering puts into providing a world where we can all “walk the flowery path of our ancestors, with dignity for all” (p. 38) She asks how Indigenous Mothering practices might offer an “otherwise military child, a radical rebirthing in a nurturing womb that intentionally centers the protection of children and Earth for future generations” (p. 38) as she theorizes alternatives for computing education curriculum. She describes the framework “Ancestral Computing for Sustainability” that promotes considerations for supporting Indigenous futurities through computing education. Sandoval poses “what if” questions that she responds to through Indigenous Motherhood ways that center children in the decisions made for communal wellness across environmental, social, and economic experiences.

Section 3: Realigning Curriculum with Indigenous Self-Determination for Indigenous Futurity

In the third section of this special issue, the articles describe ways to continue the cycles of renewal that center Indigenous ways of knowing within curriculum theory and practice and remind us that Indigenous futurity is already in motion. In the article, “Embracing Epistemological Collisions as Sites of Critical Indigenous Pedagogy: Insights From Partnering for Diné Curriculum Building,” Hollie A. Kulago (Diné), Logan Rutten, and Dorthea Litson (Diné) describe pedagogical sites that occur within their partnering work that can lead to deeper considerations for Indigenous futurity if there is intentional attention paid to epistemological commitments and collisions. Within their study that investigates the processes and practices of their partnership between a university and an Indigenous entity to build curriculum, they reveal moments in their work when Diné ways of knowing challenged the educational institution rooted in Western ways of knowing. They describe how embracing these moments as sites of critical Indigenous pedagogy supported a deeper understanding of how and where decision making can support or undermine Diné futurity.

The final article in this special issue demonstrates how Indigenous axiology, ontology, epistemology, and pedagogical “modes of teaching and learning are very much present within Indigenous communities and that land-and-water-based education offers a construct for including Indigenous epistemologies in curriculum” (Lees, et al., p. 74). In “Securing our Futures through Land and Water Education: Developing an Indigenous Language Curriculum in a Tribal Nation Early Learning Program” by Anna Lees (Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, descendant), Michele Balagot (Tulalip Tribes), Natosha Gobin (Tulalip Tribes), Michelle Myles

(Tulalip Tribes), and Elizabeth Starks (Shiwi/Diné), we learn how Coast Salish ways of knowing were meaningfully centered within their curricular framework and within the process of creating curriculum. As Indigenous families and community members worked together to create the curriculum through their ways of knowing, they found land and water as generative foundations to navigate the complexities of school-based education, a process that took patience, perseverance, and trust and “empowered [them] to do what they always wanted to do” (p. 87).

Curriculum Theory and Practice that Upends Settler Colonialism

Collectively, the articles in this special issue take up many of the “alternative aims for curriculum” that begin to surface when “curriculum studies is rematriated” by communities (Tuck, 2011, p. 36). Rematriating curriculum studies “is concerned with the redistribution of power, knowledge, and place, and the dismantling of settler colonialism” (p. 37), which the works in this special issue show us. We see that Indigenous futures are possible when people work collectively to “remember the true purpose of knowledge in/for our communities” (Tuck, 2011, p. 36), which for many meant theorizing and enacting curriculum specifically in service of Na:tinixwe, Coast Salish, or Diné futurity. As Lees and colleagues show us, framing curriculum through *huyadadčəł*, *our ways*, remembers that curriculum can and should build on the lifeways carried on from ancestors of this community since Time Immemorial. Another possibility for curriculum is to “uncover the quiet thoughts and beliefs of a community” (Tuck, 2011, p. 36), an aim that Hatch reveals when he came to learn that Two Spirit youth felt affirmed by his curriculum. By infusing Ancestral Knowledge into computing education, Sandoval invites us to consider how technology and computing can be leveraged to “make generational knowledge of Elders, youth, parents, warriors, hunters, leaders, gardeners, fishers, teachers, and others available to other generations” (Tuck, 2011, p. 36). Both Lees and her colleagues and Merrick “make use of home languages to express ideas, and to bring new language to new and recovered ideas” (Tuck, 2011, p. 36), whether through *cəkʷ-*, *təł*, and *hayəd kʷi gʷəshaydxʷs* or Na:tinixwe curriculum of renewal. They center their work within the ways of being, knowing, and ethics of their respective communities. By centering Diné ways of knowing in their partnering goals and processes and identifying epistemological collisions as sites of critical Indigenous pedagogy, Kulago and colleagues demonstrate how curriculum inquiry projects can be “crafted to have multiple points of entry, and multiple meanings to be drawn,” and developed so “that there is continuity between curriculum and community life that moves in recursive ways to further inquiry and further applications of meaning” (Tuck, 2011, p. 36). Finally, the authors here describe what Tuck (2011) called, “curriculum of repatriation or rematriation . . . an approach for participatory decolonizing educators and scholars—people who choose to consider curriculum in community, not on communities, and in ways that are anticolonial, not imperialistic” (p. 35).

We hope that after reading these diverse examples of futurity work in education, you have a sense of how your curriculum work can disrupt settler futurity and foster Indigenous futurities in curriculum. This work is intimate, personal, and also collective. This work is also not abstract, but always located somewhere, on lands that have been cherished and sustained for millennia. We invite you to think about the places you carry with you and how those might anchor your curricular theories and practices. We invite you to consider the Indigenous futurity work in curriculum that is likely already seeded and being practiced somewhere close to you. Maybe you are a leader in this work, and if so, we encourage you to continue. Maybe you are someone with a gift to offer

that movement, and if so, we encourage you to do the intentional work of figuring out your roles and responsibilities in relation to that movement. However you relate to this work, we hope that you are imagining and working toward a future in which Indigenous Peoples, lands, languages, and lifeways thrive.

Notes

1. This exercise was shared with Hollie by Kumu Shari Frias from the Ka ‘Umeke Kā‘eo school, and we have been given permission to use it here.

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