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Earth worlds and Indigenous dream-making: A reflection on teaching for beauty, repair, and balance

Mundos terrestres y la creación-realización de sueños Indígenas: Una reflexión sobre la enseñanza para la belleza, la reparación y el equilibrio

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Abstract

Based on long-term educational relationships with Indigenous communities in Peru, the U.S., and Canada, this article reflects on place-based Indigenous education in and out-of-school. From small community-based schools to tribal tertiary learning spaces, Indigenous educational leaders counter schooling as an instrument of coloniality/modernity by centering their knowledges toward relationships of interdependence for good human and planetary living. Confronting ontic and epistemic threats, Indigenous educators and students energize educational design and practice. I propose these processes as *Indigenous dream-making*, the daily work of honoring the beauty of Native earth worlds, repairing harms to the earth and her beings, and balancing difficult realities with good living. In this time of increased attention to sustainability in education and climate change action, bold Indigenous educational processes challenge human communities to learn in and across earth worlds and to teach for compassionate interconnection that can supplant the course of destructive relentless development.

Keywords: Indigenous land-centered education; Indigenous pedagogies; Indigenous dream-making.

Resumen

Basado en las relaciones educativas a largo plazo con las comunidades Indígenas en Perú, Estados Unidos y Canadá, este artículo reflexiona sobre la educación Indígena dentro y fuera de la escuela. Desde pequeñas escuelas comunitarias hasta espacios tribales de aprendizaje universitario, los líderes educativos Indígenas resisten la escolarización como un instrumento de la colonialidad/modernidad y priorizan sus propios conocimientos basados en relaciones de interdependencia para una buena vida humana y planetaria. Enfrentando amenazas onticas y epistémicas, educadores y estudiantes Indígenas dinamizan el diseño y la práctica educativa. Propongo estos procesos como la *creación-realización de sueños Indígenas*, los esfuerzos diarios de honrar la belleza de los mundos terrestres nativos, reparar los daños a la tierra y a sus seres, y equilibrar las realidades difíciles con el buen vivir. En este tiempo de atención aumentada a la sostenibilidad en la educación y las acciones contra el cambio climático, los valientes procesos educativos Indígenas desafían a las comunidades humanas a aprender en y a través de los mundos terrestres y a enseñar para una interconexión compasiva que pueda suplantarse el curso del desarrollo implacable destructivo.

Palabras clave: Educación Indígena centrada en la tierra; pedagogías Indígenas; la creación-realización de sueños Indígenas.

1. Introduction: “I, a human being”

In the city of Huancayo, the capital of the region of Junín, Peru, is the Yalpana Wasi. Translated from Quechua Wanka to English as “house of memory,” Yalpana Wasi holds a permanent exhibit that traces the evolution of my Wanka homelands and our people across the territories of Hanan Wanka, Lurin Wanka, and Xausa. Post-Spanish invasion societal and economic impacts are depicted through visual art that is accompanied by explanations of how Native people in the region experienced changes over time. From the 16th century onwards, colonial land usurpation and new development linked with exploitation of labor led to physical, mental, and spiritual hardship for Indigenous men, women, and children. Also featured throughout the multiple floors of the exhibit are resistances based on Indigenous conceptualizations of justice, socialist movements, and experimentation with Marxist ideologies that informed violent civil and military conflict across the country, peaking through the 1980s and 1990s. While the entire exhibit is striking, one section evokes what I grapple with as a Wanka and Quechua educational researcher: in an empty room lined with the government identification photos of the thousands who disappeared during the decades of violence, there is a wall with the words “I, a human being” (Ya’a huq nunam kayaa) in Quechua Wanka, Asháninka, Spanish, and English. I am struck by this statement because on this precious living planet, I am trying to understand what makes us human, what dehumanizes, and how learning is vindicated or implicated by the answers to these questions.

I begin with positionality because I wish for readers to have clarity regarding what Māori and Kanaka Maoli colleagues refer to as the authority or position from which one speaks. My work is rooted in my first-person truth—in Quechua terms, what I directly have seen, listened to, felt, lived. Since my youth, I have been fortunate to learn from communities across the Americas, including my own, and the many kinds of Indigenous educators—farmers, artists, schoolteachers, youth workers, and so on—who are concerned with what it means to live in distinct yet intersecting earth worlds. I learn from people who are themselves remembering, re-learning, and teaching values-based knowledges in places confronted with environmental decisions that will either distance or bring humans closer to each other and our more-than-human relatives.

This work is personal: a number of my cousins and I represent the first generation in our large extended family to go to university who were raised by diverse Quechua community members; our mothers are community farmers, cooks, herbalists, healers, or the maids who served middle-class to wealthy families in the cities. Today, we are a network that includes teachers, doctors, and engineers who maintain ties to our family *chakras*, farms. Surrounded by the Waytapallana mountain range and nearby Wankamayo (known as the Mantaro River), we participate in living with and caring for our places—we compose the songs that honor the springs and birds, weave and embroider Quechua flower designs, and lead cultural work that includes teaching children ritual dances for the llamas and Mother Corn harvest. Others of us make art or write about what we hope will not be forgotten, adding to the sociohistorical record of what Indigenous people produce across the Tawantinsuyo (the four quarters of ancestral Inka lands). We also make offerings to the Mountain Beings and engage ceremonial prayer during the seasons where we are called to do so. We do these things as we hold in tension that our own tropical glacier, Waytapallana, has receded by over 50% in the last two decades and that Wankamayo is so contaminated with lead and arsenic by mining operations that her waters cannot

safely be used for irrigation. We are keenly aware of soil quality, water scarcity, climate change, and threats to plant, insect, animal species as well as our land-based cultural practices and language.

This scenario could describe many Indigenous communities, which are the peoples and places that supply the planet's human and industrial animal populations with food and raw materials yet that are relegated as objectifiable "resources." These realities reflect massive pressures, including the seduction of the One World World (OWW) (Escobar, 2017) and the ongoing global proliferation of European epistemic hegemony (Grosfoguel, 2013) that dictates what constitutes knowledge, how we arrive at it, and how it is legitimately transmitted. I argue that the existence of Indigenous peoples who still relate to their earth worlds resists OWW as exemplars of pluriversality (Escobar, 2017, 2018); our educational projects do not accept epistemicide and instead offer many vital ways to be a "real human¹."

Halting trajectories of extraction that serve global commercial/consumerist culture (McMichael & Weber, 2020) requires acting from a certain conviction that is rooted in one's worldview, which many Indigenous peoples still hold. Yupiaq scholar Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley referred to worldview as the embodiment of knowledge, philosophy, relationship, values, and practices (2006). For example, Diné people speak of "hozho" and "sa'ah naaghai bik'eh hozhoon," which Lloyd Lee explains as understandings of how a Diné person *must live life*, offering instruction to humans on how to interact with others, animals, plants, the earth, and universe (2008, p. 109, my emphasis). Profoundly philosophical and intellectual, this worldview is also political and pragmatic (Lee, 2014), and therefore, I would argue, decisively educational. Another example is that in Mni Sota Makoce (Minnesota) where I live and teach, Dakota colleagues center "being a good relative" as a guide for human conduct on a planet that requires positive relations for the perpetuation of healthy life². Further, my own Quechua teachers acknowledge "ñawpaq ñan," which references a road or path that is ahead of us in space but that is ancestral in time. These are all worldviews that have served people and their places for generations and that continue to inform baseline understandings of what shapes learning across generations.

This article is a reflection on these and other themes. Based on long-term educational relationships with Indigenous communities in Peru, the U.S., and Canada, this piece reflects on the ways in which place-based Indigenous education, in and out-of-school, is rooted in loving care for Indigenous earth worlds. For over two decades as an educator and researcher, I have witnessed families, educators, and students in small community-based schools to tribal tertiary learning spaces resisting schooling as an instrument of coloniality/modernity by centering their knowledges toward relationships of interdependence for good human and planetary living. Confronting ontic and epistemic threats, Indigenous educators energize learning experiences that deepen their commitment to pluriversal appreciation through educational design and practice. This is *Indigenous dream-making*, the daily work of honoring the beauty of Native earth worlds, repairing harms to the earth and her beings, and balancing difficult realities with good living. In this time of heightened attention to sustainability in education and specifically, climate change awareness and action, creative and bold Indigenous educational processes challenge human communities to consider how learning in earth worlds offers a vision of compassionate interconnection that can supplant the course of relentless development.

1 See <https://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/articles/eaters-of-gold>.

2 See <https://dakotawicohan.org/courses/mni-sota-koce/>.

These educational practices aim to disentangle students and their communities from the commodification of knowledge as a system that reifies coloniality/modernity, moving in and with knowledges that serve to defend the planet's diverse earth worlds.

1.1. Dreaming

Indigenous peoples have been working in the depths and tide pools of and beyond decoloniality, arguably for centuries. I offer that Indigenous educators who are concerned with planetary life and their children's abilities to recognize how to live well with others tend to engage what Athabascan scholar Dian Million refers to as *intense dreaming* (Million, 2011). She writes that dreaming is,

"the effort to make sense of relations in the worlds we live, dreaming and empathizing intensely our relations with past and present and the future without the boundaries of linear time. Dreaming is a communicative sacred activity. Dreaming often allows us to creatively sidestep all the neat little boxes that obscure larger relations and syntheses of imagination." (2011, p. 315)

Dreaming is generative in education: Native, First, and original peoples hold genealogical ties to families and lands that form the foundation for connection, where asking and answering "connection to whom and to what" and "why and how" inform educational purposes and processes (Sumida Huaman & Swentzell, 2020). Thus, in many places, there are Indigenous people connected to life-sustaining knowledges that teach us to read the planet differently, and this work is at the heart of my reflection.

2. Postcolonialism, anti-colonialism, and decoloniality

I view postcolonialism, anti-colonialism, and decoloniality as complementary frames that carry implicit and explicit tensions related to how they have been theorized and who engages them and why. As well, educational researchers benefit from how scholars have evolved them by working through theory and practice for liberation and healing (hooks, 2014).

Postcolonial scholarship offers key provocations for rethinking colonial subjectivities, particularly through moving aesthetics of liberation, and can be central to helping students to understand that it is worthwhile to identify chronologies of postcolonial conditions in the places where they work and to examine those chronologies comparatively. Through the creative works of authors writing of the transition from colony to independence, students can see themselves in relation to local struggles and global movements. However, the "post" has long been a point of dissatisfaction. Peruvian comparative literature scholar Silvia Spitta (Zamora & Spitta, 2009) critiqued "post-ness" in *The Americas, Otherwise*, citing Latin American scholars who had refused the "post" out of acknowledgement of the ongoing manifestations of colonialism across the world. She and her colleagues articulated concern regarding the dominance of certain voices in postcolonial discourse, which points to scholarly gatekeeping and the privileging of voices from the so-called global north. The result is "the canonization of only those Latin American writers and artists whose work either feeds into U.S. and European fantasies of the region, or who are understood to be cosmopolitan creators of 'universal' culture" (Zamora & Spitta,

2009, p. 202). This is a critical observation for educators, researchers, and Indigenous peoples as we consider who is allowed to represent the theoretical frames that we use or cite across postcolonial, anti-colonial, and decolonial scholarship and who gets to create new ones. Through work with primarily non-dominant epistemologies, Indigenous peoples aiming to self-represent are made aware of English-speaking hegemonies that absorb Indigenous scholarship from English-speaking countries.

With my Indigenous graduate students, anti-colonialism is a helpful alternative because while other theories appear dense, my students and I appreciate the accessibility of a way of centering clear resistances to acts and structures that serve imperialism. But anti-colonialism is not so simple. In his introduction to anticolonialism and education, George Dei wrote,

"Indeed, colonialism and re-colonizing projects today manifest themselves in variegated ways—for example, the different ways knowledges get produced and receive validation within schools, the particular experiences of students that get counted as (in)valid and the identities that receive recognition and response from school authorities. The anti-colonial prism theorizes the nature and extent of social domination and the multiple places that power, and the relations of power, work to establish dominant-subordinate connections. The prism scrutinizes and deconstructs dominant discourses and epistemologies, while raising questions about its own practice." (2006, p. 2)

Dei refers to the colonial as that which is imposing and dominating and not limited to geographical, religious, political, or racialized identities. Despite the “anti” in anti-colonialism, ideas of self and other are not conflated with self versus other, and as he notes, “The idea of a unitary self does not mean opposition between self/other, insider/outsider; subjectivity/objectivity; colonizer/colonized” (2006, p. 8). In my interpretation, it is the interrogation of the nature of asymmetrical power relations and their dismantling that is at the core of anti-colonialism work.

At the same time, because “the colonial” is not straightforward, deconstructing imperial-colonial relations of power and exploring human coercion or acceptance into those relations is what Indigenous scholars like Martin Nakata (2012) call for, challenging universal acceptance of colonial constructs of racialized binaries that have educational, policy, and legal implications. For example, Nakata has asked why Indigenous peoples go to state courts to assert our rights and not the other way around? In Peru, this would mean asking why Indigenous community leaders defending their lands must demonstrate burden of proof of environmental damage in Peruvian state courts to seek corporate or government accountability and restitution. Why do those who violate not seek forgiveness and repair, appealing to Indigenous communities in Indigenous spaces using Indigenous systems? This argument is a reminder of how human communities make sense of our worlds today based on the limitations of how we read and work within the lines of lasting colonial and new neoliberal policies. Other constructs and interpretations of the world are needed.

The coloniality/modernity construct presented by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (2000, 2007) and expanded on by Latin Americanists describes the trajectories of empire-colonization over time—resulting in a matrix that includes economic, authoritative, normative, and subjective power evolving global capitalism through modernity

and development. However, as with other scholarly frameworks, there are issues of accessibility—the active invitation to dialogue in academically-supported discourse with different everyday communities and peoples has not been prioritized in the intellectual spaces where coloniality/modernity is shaped and debated. Why is this, especially when Indigenous peoples have much to contribute to understandings of modernity? For example, Aymara sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui reframes modernity on Indigenous terms (2010). She writes about the Tupac Amaru and Tupac Katari revolutions of the 1700s and makes the link between Indigenous modernity and resistance—and transformation, which holds unique cosmological significance in the Andean world. Like Rivera Cusicanqui, my students and I are compelled to argue that Indigenous peoples historically and already embody modernity despite our peoples routinely categorized as those left behind, those who wish to remain unchanged. Further, our transformation, even on our own terms, is subject to attack—we are told by the white political imaginary that the more we transform or adapt, the narrower our proximity to our Indigeneity. Such strictures control and paternalize Indigenous identities when some of our biggest challenges are preventing further harm to the earth and taking a close look at the causes of increasing separation from our earth worlds and solutions.

As an educator, I am interested in how we iteratively (re)connect using educational processes, and I work with Indigenous peoples who are committed to connection through land-based practices, using their life force to reveal the past-future within the present. In her anthology of critical contemporary Bolivian thought (2015), Rivera Cusicanqui also declares,

"Existe un mundo ch'ixi; es decir, algo que es y que no es a la vez, un gris heterogéneo, una mezcla abigarrada entre el blanco y negro, contrarios entre sí y a la vez complementarios. [There is a ch'ixi world; that is to say, something that is and is not at once a heterogenous grey, a multicolored mix between white and black, opposites of each other and at the same time, complementary]." (2015, p. 375)

She asks us to engage new observation, (re)learning, and continual (re)invention. In this cycle, lest we become attached to essentialisms, Nakata also warns, "in the absence of critical examination of contemporary innovations of Indigenous knowledge practice within Indigenous academia, the risks entailed in moving from 'epistemic disobedience' of the Western to 'epistemic obedience' of the regenerated Indigenous are less examined" (2012, p. 129).

Decoloniality offers questions that break through such problems by harnessing the realities of Indigenous community members. As a frame of educational action with Indigenous communities we might ask, How is this Quechua, Ojibwe, Tewa, or Dakota land and language-based educational design that we are offering *Quechua, Ojibwe, Tewa, or Dakota as continually transforming?*

2.1. Indigenous dream-making and dreamer-makers

If decoloniality is not a theory but lived—as decolonial scholars like Rivera Cusicanqui argue—how does the praxis contribute to priorities and aspirations of the people and places that we love? What is the relationship between theorizing, dreaming, and living decoloniality? What intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual activities do educators draw from and when, and how are those choices made? Working with Indigenous places

of learning, I also find myself asking what kinds of access, platforms, and material needs are required for the cultivation of what lies beyond decoloniality and with attention to *dream-making*—dreaming and doing Indigenous educational design that builds of and for transformation.

In some ways, Indigenous dream making responds to decoloniality's lack of reliance on Indigeneity, as a theory that is divorced from Indigenous-language planetary lenses and what Ojibwe scholar Scott Lyons (2011) calls the “actually existing” tensions within seemingly contradictory ways of being Indigenous. Given the challenges that certain human processes pose to our planet, understanding coloniality/modernity and creating opportunities for Indigenous decolonial praxis ought to be foundational for education at all levels. For example, these days, Indigenous peoples, including me, may struggle with solastalgia—Glen Albrecht's term (2007) for sorrow for the land even as we are attached to it, even as our places have not yet been completely lost to us. While it is important for this mental-emotional-spiritual sense to be named in scholarship, Indigenous sensibilities and communion can offer the most comfort for Indigenous community members and researchers (Cooper, Delormier & Tualii, 2019). However, a conundrum is not just that Indigenous peoples are grieving but that our access to knowledges and ways to mourn and heal together are becoming limited as Indigenous habitats and more than human relatives diminish. Socionatural worldviews, biocultural diversity, entanglements with ghosts and monsters—whatever scholars call the complexity of our interrelationships and disjunctures with our earth worlds—Indigenous educators are also concerned with finding ways to grieve healthily while creating learning opportunities that are responsive to continuously-adapting knowledges. Utilizing an array of tools for self-determination, new formulations of education, governance, economy, health care, and environmental stewardship are experimented toward hopes of uninterrupted and visions of transcendence from global development.

For educators, this is challenging work because within coloniality, all humans negotiate complicity. Colonizer and colonized binaries are less robust when it comes to consumerist culture and the power of extractivist capitalism embodied; meaning, Indigenous peoples and Indigenous local governments make and are coerced into troubling decisions—across the Andes, participation in mining is a force that will not be stopped, building infrastructure does not take into consideration holistic Indigenous ecological planning, and schools within our own communities negate the living legacy of our original languages. These are part of the spectrum of concessions and negotiations that generations of students will continue to face.

Although coloniality gives Indigenous educators a framework to be able to see and analyze these tensions through its domains, Indigenous decolonial praxis demands that people recognize and shift their participation in the violent anti-life acts that characterize modernity/development. For Indigenous educators, dreaming-making beyond decoloniality is critical because understanding earth worlds and studying or predicting how they are changing is not the same as being able to defend and assist in their regeneration: hence, before and beyond decoloniality, Indigenous educators as dreamer-makers center not a return to the past, current epistemic delinkings, or futurities defined by academics but rather do things now to put into motion the continuous births of possibilities. Indigenous dream-making understands that our future was not robbed from us but that it exists in the present, and *dreamer-makers* through their work are awake to the past-future in the moment's thought, feeling, and action³.

³ This point is a referencing of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's work and Quechua conceptualizations of living beings' awareness that we hold places in the ever-transforming universe.

3. The “book” of nature and the many places of learning

Much of my research has had to do with seeking life-affirming possibilities in this transforming universe. When I write about that work through the lens of Indigenous nature-mediated education (Kawagley, 2006) or Quechua and Indigenous research methodologies, tensions are revealed. On the one hand, acknowledging that (un)learning opportunities that Indigenous communities produce must address coloniality and the ongoing challenges that modernity poses to our relationships with land runs the risk of centering harms. On the other hand, Indigenous educational partners in the Americas and elsewhere do not limit stories of themselves and their communities to suffering: they speak of gifts, blessings, laughter, beauty, love. In this way, while helpful Indigenous research addresses coloniality/modernity, attention to decolonial freedoms requires pluriversal approaches to land-life relationships. For example, Julia Suárez-Krabbe describes the “death project” as the exercise of violence in coloniality that has produced racism, capitalism, patriarchy, and the desacralization of nature. However, works of good living exercised through Indigenous educational endeavors, large and small-scale, lend themselves to what Miye Tom, Terri McCarty, and I (2019) call “the life project.” The life project emerges from Indigenous dream-making that revives and honors multi-epistemic approaches to learning for the sake of perpetuating those gifts, blessings, laughter, beauty, love, etc.

Years ago, I was privileged to complete my comparative education dissertation fieldwork with Wanka and Pueblo Indian farming communities in Peru and New Mexico. As I worked with community-based farmers and formal school educators, I was inspired by the writing of environmental journalist Roger Rumrill García. Writing extensively on Andean and Amazonian ecologies, Rumrill argued that land, environment, nature connections are held in common across all learning communities, whether explicit or not, yet that human societies are forgetful:

“Sin embargo, el hombre moderno esta vacío espiritualmente y casi podríamos decir, que padece y sufre de un nuevo y peligroso analfabetismo: ha estado olvidando la lectura del gran libro de la naturaleza. [However, modern man is spiritually empty and we could almost say that he suffers and suffers from a new and dangerous illiteracy: he has been forgetting the reading of the great book of nature]”. (2009, p. 9)

In his essays, he described the Pájaro Martín Pescador, a kingfisher in the Amazon commonly known as the Catalán whose nesting choices predict flooding. He asked, “Quiénes están observando y leyendo el libro de la naturaleza para librarse de las inundaciones? Quizás muy pocos ahora en la Amazonía y menos en el resto del país” [“Who is watching and reading the book of nature to get rid of the floods? Perhaps very few now in the Amazon and less in the rest of the country”] (2009, p. 11). He wrote that pre-Columbian Indigenous peoples of the Amazon had a formidable knowledge of nature—they dialogued with her, knew her secrets, and she generously provided material and spiritual goods. He advocated for a more robust bilingual and intercultural education as more than learning in two or more languages and cultures and as communicating across understandings of nature, in ongoing conversation with our worlds and their beings. I

understood Rumrill's commentaries as calling for interepistemic education that recognizes interspecies teachings and the agency of more than human relatives in ways that enrich planetary life.

Through my work with Indigenous schools, K-12 to Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), I have come to understand that there are communities that also challenge Rumrill's fears of human forgetfulness: the farm field where Quechua corn is planted and harvested, the lake where Ojibwe manoomin (wild rice) is nurtured, and the classroom where Tewa grandmothers and grandfathers work with art teachers, are *storied places of learning*—they tell us what has been done and what is happening now in our earth worlds while making and being the links (Million, 2011) for who we believe we are in relation and who we wish to be *through* relation.

In other writing, I have described organic sites of Indigenous learning—from my own grandmother's corn and potato fields in the Mantaro Valley to the revitalized farm fields and gardens of Cochiti Pueblo (Sumida Huaman, 2009, 2014). As a child, I was deeply troubled by the fact that my mother and grandmother were not viewed as intellectual in larger Peruvian society. They were commonly labeled as rural uneducated *serranas* (highlanders), *cholas* (Indian women), and *indias* (sub or lesser human classes). As Quechua first speakers, they were viewed as deficient, especially in the case of my grandmother who exclusively spoke Quechua. Yet they, my aunts, and older cousins who took care of me knew how to calculate the weather and project impact to crops, how to prevent plagues and insect infestations, how to pick medicines for illnesses and to accurately measure their dosage, and how to tell the most riveting stories of gods and monsters. They also longed for other kinds of learning—they had dreams of becoming doctors or mathematicians and cited inspiration from our ancestors who they taught me to see as masterful at adaptation and innovation. From them, I learned that community places are sites of unparalleled learning and that colonial violence is not just about the physical beatings, rapes, and murders of our people but also about the mythicization that Indigenous peoples never had anything to offer the European idea of civilization, and furthermore, that our ability to choose to adapt and innovate could be severed due to lack of access to opportunities like formal education.

During my doctoral studies at Teachers College, Columbia University, I did not have the language to appropriately argue that a farm field is also a type of classroom—better than a classroom because it is a place of recognizing the universe as profound interconnections, a values-rich space of mathematics, biology, chemistry, history, art, and cosmological study. In my conventional scholarship, I learned to be satisfied with terms for learning in communities that ran the risk of being qualified as haphazard and not robust, like “informal” and “nonformal” until later settling on more observational terms like “in and out-of-school.” However, I was also seeing the ways in which communities were rethinking their complicity in compulsory schooling laws and learning from each other's experiences across the globe. For example, Māori and Kanaka Maoli language nests were proliferating through the 2000s, and these projects very clearly came from the will to reclaim school space and time according to Indigenous visions.

3.1. Teaching for beauty, repair, and balance: Indigenous land-based schools

In my research, I have described “small Indigenous schools” with whom I have close connections (Sumida Huaman, 2020, 2022). I immersed myself in work with Native schools in Canada, the U.S., and Peru partly because of the stories of my mother and

grandmother and others like them and because of the search for a different way to learn. As a researcher, I wanted to understand the origins of these schools, how they are a part of their homelands while apart from state and transnational agendas that are far too often at odds with what they are building. I wanted to learn from their scribes and orators and those who support and even oppose them, to understand their moments of disappointment and triumph and what they wished for others to know about their work. Although I do not reiterate those collaborative studies or our newer conversations here, I share my heartfelt reflections of them, which I hope will give readers pause that decoloniality must not forget about (or romanticize) Indigenous communities and peoples—that decoloniality for education is also about standing up for projects of autochthonous self-determination and restoring Indigenous peoples' abilities to care for themselves and their places.

I have been fortunate to work with well-regarded Onyota'aka (people of the standing stone) educators at Oneida Nation of the Thames in southwestern Ontario, Canada. While Canada is vast, there are such important things happening in seemingly small places. According to current statistics for Canada⁴, there are approximately 38 million Canadians, of which over 1,600,000 are First Nations (977,230), Inuit (65,025 Inuit), or Métis (587,545 Métis) people. There are 617 First Nations, 126 of which are in Ontario where there are 124 reserve schools that serve almost 13,000 students. The Oneida Nation of the Thames has over 6000 band members, over 2000 of whom live in the community. Working with traditional chiefs, clan mothers, and Longhouse families, ceremonial leaders started one school that has been running in the community since the 1980s. Overseen by spiritual leaders in their community, up to 40 middle and high school students at any given time are immersed in a Haudenosaunee language and worldview expressed through explicit pedagogical relationship with the months and seasons. Students learn cultural practices through daily school-based time, including developing oratory skills and speech-making in the language, constructing materials for social and ceremonial events, and conducting those ceremonies for community members across the Haudenosaunee communities in Canada and the U.S. Their teachers are spiritual leaders and community members hired based on qualifications of ceremonial and language knowledge and the well-regarded character of their person in community.

Over 7,200 kilometers (about 4,500 miles) from Ontario, Canada, there is a small Quechua school in the Sacred Valley of the Inkas, also doing critical work in a seemingly small rural place in comparison to the bustling activity of Peru's major cities. According to the most recent census in Peru⁵, around 80% of the total population (of 33 million) identifies with some Indigenous ancestry—22% are self-identified Indigenous, and 60% claim mixed Indigenous and other ancestry, which implies genealogical affiliation, distant or close, with any of the 47 possible Indigenous languages from the diverse geographies that make up the country. Of the Indigenous populations, well over 3 million people identify as Quechua language speakers. Today in Peru, there are over 3 million children in primary school and about 2.5 million in secondary school. There are over 6,000 primary schools available to Indigenous children and over 1,300 secondary bilingual intercultural education schools.

4 See <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1602010609492/1602010631711> and https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/subjects-start/indigenous_peoples.

5 See <https://censo2017.inei.gob.pe> and http://www.scielo.org.pe/scielo.php?script=sci_issuetoc&pid=2071-507220190002&lng=es&nrm=iso.

In 2008, I met Hilaria Supa Huamán, then- congressional representative for the region of Cusco, at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York City. We developed a professional relationship, and the following year when I was conducting fieldwork, I met with her in Lima where she told me about a Quechua-serving school. Surrounded by precious Inka farming terraces that are still in use today, the school was built using natural materials, like adobe, by families, community members, and students. Partnering with Waldorf educators, school leaders centered Quechua epistemologies and pedagogies in an educational plan with Waldorf methods as a resource for protecting Quechua land-based cultural practices. Serving approximately 100 early childhood education through secondary school students, the school offers an educational experience that includes Quechua language and cultural practices for children who will not endure the racial discrimination and inequalities that their parents and grandparents faced. The school's entire curriculum is based on the Andean calendar, a dedicated system of agricultural living and associated activities in the Andean world—recognition of our mountains relations, and how to understand and dialogue with beings, from the smallest ant to Mother Ocean.

Educational design responsibilities in places like Oneida or the Sacred Valley are part of greater Indigenous ontological-spiritual, epistemological, and political projects. The movement to reclaim schooling as profoundly place-based is a commitment to hold close an Indigenous worldview that also recognizes our places as interconnected. In the way that Indigenous peoples get to know each other—from Canada to Peru and everywhere in between, our places also speak with each other—the soil, waters, winds, and animals know themselves to be in relation. Science has long confirmed this—what happens in China's skies matter to the state of Washington's rivers. As a result of this awareness, the Indigenous educators I work with are highly motivated to rethink and remake education in ways that serve as intervention to ontic losses and ontological threats; that is, if we are land-centered peoples as we claim, what does it mean when these lives and elements are harmed, taken, lost, and how can education change the trajectory of dominant development and its impacts as we know them, including extractive industry, mass consumerism, and climate change?

Across the world's regions, most Indigenous children attend dominant schooling systems, and even in tribal-serving schools⁶, there is no guarantee that the primary language of instruction will be in the Indigenous language or that students are being taught *through* earth-centric community-based practices. In the bigger scheme of things, small Indigenous schools are not statistically significant. But statistical significance is a concern of Western research, not for “actually existing” Indigenous communities. A claim that Indigenous peoples, despite being a global population minority, have a place with this planet, is an assertion of the gift of breath and our abilities to contribute to planetary wellness—these are often referred to as original instructions or the original teachings by many Indigenous groups⁷. Small Indigenous schools as learning places offer something—call it the hope for (re)connection, remembrance, vitality—to their communities, other Indigenous nations, and the earth's allies.

6 This is not intended to be an absolute statement. There are exceptions, including Indigenous language medium schools.

7 I do not cite scholarship on this point as the notion of original instructions, creation stories/emergence stories are told in communities, and I have been fortunate to hear these in-person in trusted spaces from Indigenous community knowledge holders in Canada, the U.S., and Peru. Thus, no scholar writing in academic terms or otherwise, Indigenous or not, owns the idea of original instructions.

3.2. Beauty, repair, balance

Tsianina Lomawaima and Terri McCarty's "safety zone theory" in American Indian schooling helps to name why working for beauty, repair, and balance are necessary today. Their research on American Indian boarding schools in the U.S. demonstrates that Indigenous peoples negotiate a safety zone in education whose parameters are set by colonial regimes, agent actors, and dominant society (2006). They ask, what is considered "safe" about Indian identities such that those can be supported through schooling, and what elements are considered "dangerous" such that they need to be erased, often in violent ways? In 2014, they brought forward additional meanings of safety zones. For Lomawaima, the safety zone is colonial consolidation of a zone of domesticated, controlled, and remnant "Indian-ness" that distills settler colonial nostalgia about an Indigenous past while reaping the benefits of life lived now on violently-dispossessed Indigenous lands. They ask researchers to think about how educational agendas and spaces participate in furthering imperial safety or threatening it, and where it is safe to be Indigenous on Indigenous terms. As such, Lomawaima proposes that Indigenous zones of safety be re-framed as *zones of sovereignty*.

Likewise, Noelani Goodyear-Ka'opua's portrait of Kanaka Maoli charter school Halau Ku Mana (HKM) offers pedagogies of aloha 'aina that exemplify Indigenous sovereign pedagogies. Indigenous sovereign pedagogies are characterized by being collaborative, politically engaging learners and families, and providing deep land connectivity. As an enactment of Indigenous sovereign pedagogies, Goodyear-Ka'opua writes (2013) that pedagogies of aloha demonstrate how Kanaka Maoli enact ea (sovereignty, rule, independence, life, breath, action) in ways that recognize that sovereignty is not just a kind of political status but a way of living in relation to land and others. She reminds us that there is urgency to look to the ancestral storehouses of knowledge due to environmental changes linked with economic ones, and how those knowledge storehouses can help us to make better decisions than what imperialism has wrought. In my work with small Indigenous schools, educators who engage Indigenous dream-making also articulate their versions of Indigenous sovereign pedagogies, such as pedagogies of "the good pathway" and "the happy/beautiful life," by identifying specific place-based languaged enactments of those pedagogies.

Foundationally, these pedagogies are expressed and embodied diversely as they emerge from and serve Indigenous knowledge systems. For example, the schools that I work with follow their own *Indigenous community-based calendar*—indicating the entire community's involvement in specific seasons and different phases of time within the seasons. School educators deeply know their earth worlds and enact protocols of doing within these places. They know when and what to teach and how to offer lessons that are rich exchanges that actively transcend the epistemic boundaries between schools, the community lifeways in which they are situated, and the goings-on of their earth worlds.

As a result, the schools are *place-based, cultural practice-based, and nature-mediated* (Kawagley, 2006). For example, they utilize philosophies in their languages that undergird "peoplehood," where peoplehood is not people-centered but about the *relationships* that people live—what Holm, Pearson & Chavis (2003) and Corntassel (2012) refer to as the interlocking features of language, homeland, ceremonial cycles, and sacred living histories. Original languages affirm environmental contexts that further secure the relationship between people and place. For example, in the Quechua school, months are named in the

language and characterized by songs composed by each grade. The songs celebrate and center the beauty and generosity of more-than-human protagonists. Daily classroom discussions and special school events reference terms like *ayllpanchis—our land*, as opposed to yours or mine, and indicating collective responsibility to care for the land.

Indigenous places of learning are also assertions of *self-determination and self-development*. They resist state and corporate oppression of Indigenous communities and Indigenous complicity with the normative through the reclamation of values and actively teaching and modeling an ethic of care. Values are talked about and practiced through the smallest acts—at the Quechua school, the littlest children in the early childhood education program pick up insects that make their way into the classroom spaces and respectfully move them outside. Teachers are storytellers who connect their listeners within a vast genealogical, historical, and environmental past and future through intimate knowledge of their present surroundings—trees, waters, winds, creatures, are all named and referred to in relation to the person. This kind of teaching today becomes an act of repair, or what in Quechua we would call *ch'uyanchay*—meaning to clear up, to resolve, to clean.

However, the work of Indigenous dream-making is *marbled or ch'ixi*—from Aymara scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010). Because many Indigenous cultural practices have experienced fissures, we know some things and parts of things, but these do not always translate into the work of fully recovering them. Despite our best intentions and as we honor the planet's beauty and attempt to repair wherever possible what has been hurt, Indigenous humans proliferate microplastics, drive cars, or bank with institutions that invest in furthering environmental harms. These tensions reflect the balance that we may seek—in Quechua this is the *yanantin*, the duality of dark and light, life and death, complementarity through difference. This could beg the question, What is Indigenous about what Indigenous places of learning do or choose not to do? But I think this is not a useful question. Much of our mainstream modern daily existence, particularly in formal schooling, extracts from Indigenous lands and benefits from colonial usurpations. Modern schooling is not inherently an Oneida or Quechua invention. But Indigenous places of learning in their many forms have earned the right to find their own ways to exist, to become what they will become. And there are no easy answers to what they are or what they will do—school leaders confront policies that control their creativity; educators, students, and graduates experience hurtful tensions with their own people—confronted with questions about what is lost in the way of “real progress” due to focus on Indigenous cultural practices, knowledges, and languages.

4. Conclusion: “We belong to the earth”

The story that schooling leads to a better life is powerful—while the story can be true within the confines of coloniality, it largely reflects someone else's troubling dream for Indigenous peoples. Indigenous education projects that are place-based and co-led by community-based dream-makers challenge the trajectory of coloniality/modernity—they live in the realm of possibilities of what education can do.

Visiting Indigenous schools and community-based learning opportunities from fish camps to farm fields, I have listened to several recurring aspirational themes articulated by Indigenous families—that their children know happiness and love, that they remember and learn their purpose, and that they walk through the world gently and kindly,

awake and aware to all that surrounds them so that they can *become*. The freedom to *become* is what Indigenous dream-making is about, eloquently expressed through the visual art⁸ and writing of Tewa artists Nora Naranjo Morse, Eliza Naranjo-Morse, Tessie Naranjo, and Rina Swentzell—that we are all *becoming becoming becoming* to return to the earth and sky. Thus, humans experience education not to arrive at an economic destination of self-realization but to journey through a healthy life to give back to our center as well beings. In Quechua, this is *sumaq kawsay*, the completeness of a person through a good life that appreciated planetary beauty, repaired, and strived for balance.

In the spirit of honoring Indigenous educators and students working in places at the front lines of climate shift and Indigenous resistance, I end with the words of artist, teacher, and co-founder of the Quechua school with which I have been honored to work, Hugo Franco Salas. He says,

"If we look for our boys and girls...to be capable people, with values, knowledges, wisdom sufficient to undertake life without the necessity of competing, which is what the majority of conventional education promotes in the world—to be the triumphant one, the winner, means that you have to defeat everyone else. Here we say be triumphant without defeating the rest, be triumphant as an individual, but also *be triumphant as part of community*." (*Fieldnotes, August 2013*)

It is precisely this realization that inspires people as imperfect and loved beings—that community entails the human and more than human world, individuals and the many, and that the work now and ahead is for all of us.

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8 See https://americanindian.si.edu/collections-search/objects/NMAI_282067.

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