


Building a space to dream: Supporting indigenous children's survivance through community-engaged social and emotional learning

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Abstract

Indigenous communities practice survivance and challenge social and political systems to support their children's identity and well-being. Grounded in transformative social-emotional learning (SEL) and tribal critical race theory, this 3-year community-based participatory research study (2019–2021) examined how a SEL program co-created with an Indigenous community in Flathead Nation in Montana supports anti-racism and anti-colonialism among Indigenous children. Critical reflexivity and thematic analyses of Community Advisory Board meetings and journals written by 60 students ($M_{\text{age}} = 10.3$, $SD = 1.45$; 47% girls; 60% Native American) during the SEL program revealed themes on Indigenous identity, belonging, wellness, and colonialism. These results shed light on challenging the racist and colonial roots of education to support Indigenous children's survivance and social-emotional well-being.

When I take care of myself it makes me a better friend and student because when I take care of myself, I can spread kindness.

—A third-grade student's reflection on reciprocity.

Indigenous communities practice survivance. They are more than just survivors of oppression: they are actively resistant, present, and full of life (Vizenor, 2009). Survivance represents active resistance against generations of colonial and racist acts, such as violence, removal, and forced assimilation. These acts have imposed cumulative and persistent emotional and psychological distress on Indigenous peoples, known as historical

trauma (Campbell & Evans-Campbell, 2011; Skewes & Blume, 2019). Despite the historical experiences of genocide and cultural erasure by White settler-colonialists, Indigenous communities continue to thrive.

Indigenous survivance has also included challenging the existing social and political structures through anti-racism and anti-colonialism to support their children's identity development. While anti-racism has been defined as the continual process to eradicate racism and oppression (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021), anti-colonialism, also referred as decolonization, has been defined as recognizing and combating against the settler-colonialist power and subsequent oppression of Indigenous peoples (Smith et al., 2019). Settler-colonialists (in the United States and elsewhere) employed racism as a tool to obtain land and

Abbreviations: CAB, Community Advisory Board; CBPR, community-based participatory research; CRT, critical race theories; CSKT, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes; ERI, ethnic and racial identity; SEL, social-emotional learning; TribalCrit, tribal critical race theory.

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access natural resources (Wolfe, 2006). Colonialism, therefore, is not a specific event, but a structure in which race (i.e., blood quantum) was used to justify the genocide of Indigenous peoples in order to obtain power and money (Wolfe, 2006). Anti-colonialism, like anti-racism, is an active effort to disrupt existing social-political structures that oppress Indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities have done this active work by ensuring that their children maintain their tribal and personal identity (Whitesell et al., 2006), as well as through efforts like language immersion schools that promote children's spiritual and cultural ties to their land and tribal identity (Arviso & Holm, 2001; McCarty & Nicholas, 2014). These efforts promote Indigenous survivance.

In addition to teaching Indigenous children their culture and language, Indigenous communities have been committed to support children's social-emotional well-being (Association of Alaska School Boards, 2015). Indigenous students experience disparities in mental health and academic achievement compared to their peers from other ethnic groups (Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute, 2019). Social-emotional learning (SEL) programs that promote the development of social-emotional competencies in childhood, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building, and decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2013), may serve as protective factors against emotional distress and academic challenges (Chain et al., 2014). These competencies have been shown to provide an important foundation for students' academic performance, success in schools, and long-term mental health and emotional well-being (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012). Most SEL programs, however, are often developed for non-Indigenous populations without addressing inequalities rooted in institutional racism. Transformative SEL framework (Jagers et al., 2019) embodies cultural responsiveness and anti-racism to promote identity, agency, engagement, and sense of belonging for all children, thus is more likely to support Indigenous survivance.

Despite the importance of supporting Indigenous children's survivance through anti-racism and anti-colonialism, there continues to be questions: What does the development of anti-racism and anti-colonialism look like for Indigenous children? How do we support such development in public schools? Extant research on these questions is relatively limited, and research on the development of anti-racism has primarily focused on adolescence, particularly among youth of color and their development of ethnic and racial identity (ERI) in middle and high schools (Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021). Studies that examine ERI development from early to middle adolescence have found that ERI contributes to adolescents' positive school adjustment (Medina et al., 2020) and greater civic beliefs (Bañales et al., 2020). It remains unclear whether similar findings

apply to younger children in elementary schools, especially for Indigenous children in their multi-layered contexts (LaFromboise et al., 2006; Loe, 2020). To address these gaps and incorporate Indigenous community's voices, this exploratory study examined how to support the development of anti-racism and anti-colonialism among Indigenous children through community-based participatory research with a focus on Indigenous survivance.

As a partnership of Indigenous community members and non-Indigenous researchers, our central question was: How did a culturally responsive SEL program that was co-created through community engagement support Indigenous children's survivance and development of anti-racism and anti-colonialism? To address this question, we explored two subquestions: (1) What themes of anti-racism and anti-colonialism arose from the co-creation process of the SEL program? (2) How did students respond to and act on these themes as they participated in the SEL program?

Historical and contemporary contexts for indigenous survivance

Indigenous survivance exists because of the strengths of their communities. The individual, family, and community levels of a child's ecological contexts are interrelated and influence their development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Campbell & Evans-Campbell, 2011). For instance, many individuals who attended boarding schools experienced significant abuse, resulting in being taught unhealthy and non-traditional parenting practices, which put them at risk for trauma exposure and emotional difficulties. Thus, through the generational effects of historical trauma, Indigenous children's development can be negatively impacted by traumatic events that they have not directly experienced.

This cumulative, historical trauma impacting Indigenous children, families, and communities today began with the European colonists introducing devastating diseases and forcibly removing Indigenous peoples from their lands. The colonists' belief in manifest destiny, their right to the land and other resources on the North American continent, was founded on White supremacy and the idea that their culture was superior to the cultures of the Indigenous peoples (Skewes & Blume, 2019). These racist ideas were the basis of racist policies and government actions (e.g., broken treaties, General Allotment Act of 1887), which was intended to uphold the power of European colonists and their worldviews in systematic ways. Another example of racist policies was the federal government's decision to sell reservation lands to non-tribal members, with the intention that the presence of White settlers would speed up the assimilation of tribal members (Wilkins & Lomawaima, 2001). These acts of racism and colonialism continue to persist,

such as through microaggressions and federal actions (e.g., construction of pipelines through treaty lands). Despite the negative impact from cumulative, historical trauma, and persistent racist policies, Indigenous communities practice survivance to support their children's identity development.

Understanding indigenous children's identity development through anti-colonialism

Indigenous children's development, like those of other marginalized populations, is embedded within multiple ecological contexts, yet integrated within social position (e.g., class, gender) and social stratification (e.g., racism, discrimination; García Coll et al., 1996). This integrated model of child development highlights that it is not possible to understand Indigenous children's development without considering both the inhibiting environments (e.g., inadequate educational resources and difficulty accessing appropriate mental health care) and promoting environments (e.g., tribal language supports in schools). Indigenous children's development, therefore, must be understood in the broader contexts that affect their identity and well-being.

Indigenous identity has been described as a place-based existence that is first about reciprocity and relationship (Styres, 2019). Although Indigenous identity is sometimes described as a racial category, Indigenous scholars have continuously emphasized that it is really about authenticity and how an individual relates to their world (Styres, 2019). Indeed, categories such as "American Indian or Alaska Native" are used by the U.S. federal government as a racial category, when in fact, Indigenous scholars have emphasized that it is a political and legal definition (Brayboy, 2005). These categorizations and definitions are rooted in colonialism, hegemony, and privilege, and permeates how the federal government has defined race in Indigenous communities.

To challenge the existing colonial structures while acknowledging Indigenous identity, we define anti-colonialism similarly to Smith et al. (2019), which centers on Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, recognizes the settler-colonialist power over Indigenous resources, and focuses on post-colonial examinations of oppression of Indigenous peoples. More specifically, anti-colonialism initiatives in mental health are to heal trauma, promote resilience, and practice survivance (Hartmann et al., 2019), which should occur at both the individual and systems level. At the individual level, engaging in anti-colonialism is about recognizing the historical and contemporary experiences of trauma associated with settler-colonialism, as well as about recognizing the strengths in Indigenous peoples and communities that foster coping skills and resilience, and thus promoting their wellness. At the systems level, engaging in anti-colonialism is recognizing and dismantling the systemic

barriers (e.g., within education) contributing to marginalization and oppression of Indigenous people (Pham et al., 2021). Anti-colonialism is about supporting survivance in which healing should be based on Indigenous identity, rather than current mainstream models of psychological science.

Like psychological science (Buchanan et al., 2021), research in child development primarily uses Western, Eurocentric epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies (Chilisa, 2020). Indigenous scholars across the world have urged researchers from Western institutions to conduct "counter-colonial" research that uses critical reflexivity (Nicholls, 2009) and is community-engaged. This counter-colonial research is responding to years of Western institutions perpetuating harm in Indigenous communities, where they have been "researched to death" (Blair, 2015, p. 472). Scholars (e.g., Quintana et al., 2006) have emphasized the importance of addressing cultural validity within child development research, yet there are few studies that address the sociocultural contexts of child development, particularly the colonial contexts. Among the few studies that have included Indigenous children, the research epistemology and methodology have not explicitly integrated the Indigenous community's voices. To shift the paradigm and center community voices throughout the research process, child development research needs to be conducted with an anti-colonialism lens. This lens re-imagines and re-creates how knowledge is defined and conceptualized.

Theoretical framework grounded in transformative SEL and TribalCrit

To ensure our research was conducted with an anti-colonialism lens, we grounded our theoretical framework in transformative SEL (Jagers et al., 2019) and tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit; Brayboy, 2005). While transformative SEL challenges existing power systems to address inequalities rooted in institutional racism, TribalCrit attends specifically to the Indigenous context, centering the voices of the Indigenous community throughout the research.

Broadly, SEL integrates five core competencies including (1) self-awareness (e.g., understanding oneself), (2) self-management (e.g., managing stress, impulse control), (3) social awareness (e.g., taking perspectives and empathizing with others), (4) relationship skills (e.g., building healthy relationships), and (5) responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2013). Although promoting these competencies have produced positive outcomes, this individual competence-oriented approach to SEL has been criticized for perpetuating hegemonic miseducation, as it ignores the primary social contexts that has negatively impacted the health and wellness of communities of color (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021). As a response to such criticism, transformative SEL has been

proposed to examine critically the root causes of racial and economic inequities (Jagers et al., 2019). Anchored in justice-oriented citizenship, transformative SEL expands the CASEL framework to focus on culture, identity, agency, belonging, and engagement, fostering critical self- and social awareness and responsible individual and collective actions in children and adults.

Although the general principles of transformative SEL—including building a democratic, reciprocal, and inclusive school climate—apply to children from all ethnic groups and backgrounds, they do not pertain to the unique historical and contemporary contexts for Indigenous children. Thus, we draw on TribalCrit literature (Brayboy, 2005) to expand the transformative SEL framework to understand culturally responsive SEL for Indigenous children. TribalCrit extends early critical race theories (CRT; e.g., Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) to Indigenous education, highlighting tribal sovereignty, knowledge, and culture as central to understanding the lived experiences of Indigenous people, and emphasizing that White supremacy and colonialism are endemic to U.S. education and society (Brayboy, 2005). TribalCrit differs from other CRT because it acknowledges that while racism is certainly pervasive in the United States, colonialism is also a considerable factor in the lives of Indigenous peoples.

Furthermore, TribalCrit emphasizes that Indigenous communities have a right to self-determination regarding their children's education, including “the right to linguistic and cultural expression according to local language and norms, self-expression through local language” (Wilkins & Lomawaima, 2001, p. 65). Many Indigenous communities have a strong desire to revitalize what has been disrupted by colonization, healing from the despairing separation between their identity and their language, land, and worldview. To fulfill such desires, culturally responsive schooling, including approaches to SEL, should aim to restore endangered language, reintroduce land-based education, and integrate traditional culture and spirituality (Brayboy, 2005). Thus, transformative SEL infused with culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous children may have the potential to explicitly address the perpetuation of racism in schools and incorporate Indigenous epistemology.

Taken together, transformative SEL and TribalCrit drive the epistemology and ontology of our study, as well as the partnership between the Indigenous community and university researchers in co-creating a culturally responsive SEL for their children. The authors' emic and etic positionality as both insiders and outsiders influences the epistemology and ontology of this study, through what Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall refers to as Two-Eyed Seeing: “to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together” (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335). It is with this lens that we acknowledge that for

those of us who are non-Indigenous, we can only start to understand the lived experiences of the community members during this study. It is only through such collaboration could we possibly disrupt the current systems that result in significant inequity for Indigenous children in public schools.

The present study

To summarize, this current study explored how to support Indigenous children's survivance, or more narrowly defined as their development of anti-colonialism and anti-racism, in the context of a culturally responsive SEL program that was co-created through active community engagement. In particular, we focused on the unique developmental period of middle childhood (elementary school ages) given the increasingly prominent roles that the school environment and children's relationships with peers and teachers play in their lives. Compared to early childhood, children of this age group develop a more differentiated concept of self and others (Frey & Ruble, 1985), regulate their expression of bias in ways that younger children do not, and are more sensitive to context demands (Nesdale & Lawson, 2011). For example, after learning lessons on racism, White children (ages 6–11) demonstrated less bias and more positive attitudes toward African Americans (Hughes et al., 2007). Similarly, Sabzalian (2019) documented how children of this age group were capable of recognizing colonial scripts of victimization and erasure of Indigenous people in their school curriculum (e.g., the Pilgrims and invented Indians, Halloween costumes, and tokenism celebration of Thanksgiving holiday) and subsequently, how they can actively confront and resist such scripts. These research studies highlight that anti-racist and inclusionary school norms promoted through the culturally responsive SEL program may influence the attitudes and behaviors of children in this age group.

Indeed, although there is increasing attention to supporting adolescents' development of anti-racism, much less is known about children's development of anti-racism or anti-colonialism during middle childhood. Research has primarily focused on examining adolescents' development of ERI (Bañales et al., 2020). For example, in a recent review, Umaña-Taylor and Rivas-Drake (2021) argued that ERI development is particularly important to support youth of color in combating systemic racism. Similarly, Loyd and Williams's (2017) review on programs to promote ERI for African American youth found that when programs adopt a culture-specific philosophy, they support adolescents' endorsement of Afrocentric values and positive identity development. These findings suggested that community-engaged SEL that incorporates cultural values and emphasizes Indigenous identity is likely to support Indigenous adolescents' development

of anti-racism. It is unclear if similar findings apply to middle childhood. By partnering and engaging with the Indigenous people on the Flathead Nation in Montana, this study aimed to add empirical evidence to this gap through an innovative approach of community-based participatory research.

METHOD

Driven by transformative SEL and TribalCrit, we examined data collected from a 3-year community-based participatory research (CBPR) study. The combined methods of community-based, participatory, and action research of CBPR “use research and activist practices to produce knowledge and at the same time engage broad community stakeholders in order to produce meaningful social changes” (Huffman, 2017, p. 1). We envision such social changes will disrupt existing systemic racism and colonialism and further support Indigenous children's survivance. Each stage of this CBPR study was reviewed and approved by the tribal college's Institution Review Board. The study timeline, activities, and data collection procedures are summarized in [Table 1](#).

Study context and participants

Indigenous context

Our study was conducted on the lands of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) of the Flathead Nation, which have a history of policies marked by the U.S. government's betrayal. The reservation was established in 1855 through the Hellgate Treaty without meeting the condition of Chief Victor, forcing the Salish people to relocate (O'Neill, 1994). Despite that the Hellgate Treaty terms guaranteed exclusive use of the land to the CSKT, in 1910, the U.S. government opened the reservation to White homesteaders (O'Neill, 1994).

The Flathead Nation has made great efforts to preserve their culture and exercise their rights, despite acts of colonization and racist federal policies. For example, in the 1890s, federal assimilation policies prohibited traditional dances, and the Flathead Nation held a Fourth of July Powwow, saying that they were celebrating Independence Day (CSKT, n.d.). Since 2002, they have established a language immersion school to preserve their language (Salish-Pend d'Oreille Culture Committee, 2019). In 2020, Congress restored Flathead Nation's ownership of the National Bison Range, which was created on their land in 1908 by the federal government without their consent (CSKT, 2019). These efforts highlight the survivance of the Flathead Nation.

The student SEL program was created for and piloted in a public school district located on the Flathead Nation, where the school district comprised of approximately

75% of Indigenous students. There are a number of tribal nations represented in this school. The public school system on reservations can be complicated because the education system is guided by the dominant culture and by the federal and state governments that make curricular and structural decisions on teaching and learning. At the same time, the public school is also held accountable by the tribal education department, and by Montana law that requires schools to incorporate the *Indian Education for All Act* into their curriculum.

Community-researcher partnership

Guided by a community liaison, who is a member of the CSKT and has served in the roles of teacher, cultural broker, and confidant (Goforth et al., 2021), the university research team partnered with key stakeholders and respected members from the tribe, school, and the local community to form the projects' Community Advisory Board (CAB). The principal investigator (first author) met with tribal stakeholders individually, listened to issues of which they cared deeply before asking their advice on recruiting CAB members. Following the advice, the university research team attended community events to meet potential CAB members and sent out individual invitations to other candidates by mails, emails, and phone calls, many of whom were well-regarded leaders in the school and the local community. Then, those members invited other community members with whom they had established relationships to the initial CAB meetings. Aligning with CBPR research orientation (Huffman, 2017), the membership of CAB was gradually established through authentic partnerships between researchers and community members. The partnership for this project includes one community liaison (woman; Native American), 13 CAB members (12 women, one man; 10 Native American, three White), and seven university researchers (seven women; three White, two Native American, one Chinese, one Korean American).

CAB members

Among the 13 CAB members, two were Indigenous teachers (one Salish and one Little Shell Chippewa) who had worked in the school for over three decades before retiring recently. These two CAB members helped develop the SEL curriculum and served as co-authors on this paper. There were two White educators who were the school psychologist and school counselor, three tribal stakeholders who directed education and health programs, and seven additional community members who were leaders of different youth service organizations. Many of these CAB members were also parents, grandparents, relatives, and caregivers of the children. Following CBPR research principles, the partnership between the CAB and the university research team allowed the CAB to perceive themselves as equitable partners

TABLE 1 Study timeline, major activities, and data collection

Study timeline and activities	Data collected: subquestion 1 What themes of anti-racism and anti-colonialism arose from the co-creation process of the SEL program?	Data collected: subquestion 2 How did students respond to and act on these themes as they participated in the SEL program?
<p>Step 1: connecting with key stakeholders</p> <p><i>August 2018–June 2019:</i> meetings with key stakeholders (e.g., the CSKT Tribal Council, the Indian Education Committee, the School Board, educators and students in the public school)</p>	Correspondence between university researchers and the community liaison, CAB members, and key stakeholders	
<p>Step 2: immersing into the community</p> <p><i>February 2019–December 2019:</i> monthly community dinner meetings between the CAB and university research team</p> <p><i>August 2019–June 2020:</i> monthly CAB meetings to gather and establish core ideas for a community-engaged, place-based SEL program for Indigenous students in the local public school; communication shifted to virtual formats (e.g., Zoom) since <i>March 2020</i></p>	Reflective memos from university researchers Audio recordings, transcriptions and notes of eight CAB meetings	
<p>Step 3: co-creating and piloting the SEL curriculum for students</p> <p><i>September–February 2021:</i> bi-weekly Zoom meetings between the principal investigator, three CAB members, and the project manager to develop the SEL curriculum</p> <p><i>March 2021–May 2021:</i> pilot of SEL curriculum during the hour-long weekly lessons in grades 3–6, taught by the school counselor; weekly Zoom meetings among the school counselor, CAB members, and university researchers to refine the SEL curriculum based on students' experiences during the SEL program</p>	Audio recordings, transcriptions and notes of 15 meetings on developing the SEL curriculum	Journal entries written by students while participating in the SEL curriculum

Abbreviations: CAB, Community Advisory Board; SEL, social-emotional learning.

who were essential to the whole research process. The CAB guided the university research team in understanding the community and school contexts, exploring the core issues that the community has been grappling with, and identifying solutions to these issues.

University researchers

The university research team included three faculty, a graduate research assistant, a program manager, and two undergraduate research assistants. The three faculty members included: (1) a Chinese woman with expertise in child development and classroom teaching and learning, who supervises pre-service teachers in the school where the SEL program was created; (2) a White American and Australian woman with expertise in culturally responsive school-based mental health, who works closely with the school psychologist (CAB member) in training school psychology graduate students; and (3) a White woman with expertise in counseling and cultural approaches to wellness, who had mentored the school counselor (CAB member). The graduate research assistant was a White doctoral student in school psychology with training in culturally responsive practices, who had also completed her practicum in a school located in the tribal nation. The project manager was a Korean American woman who grew up in the community where the research was conducted. Finally, there

were two Indigenous undergraduate research assistants (one studied art education, one studied humanities and sciences, both are Chippewa Cree) who contributed to CAB engagement.

Student participants

Approved by the school administrators and the tribal college's Institution Review Board, we recruited students from all of the eight classrooms from the third to sixth grades of the elementary school. These students shared a physical learning space together as their classrooms were housed in the school's third to sixth upper elementary school building, which was separate from the pre-kindergarten to second-grade building and the junior high and high school building. In total, 60 students ($M_{\text{age}} = 10.3$, $SD = 1.45$) participated in this study (47% girls; 60% Native American, 25% White, 7% Latinx, and 15% Identified with more than one race or ethnicity). All students in the school received free or reduced lunch.

Co-creating and piloting the SEL program

Based on critical ideas raised from the eight CAB meetings, three CAB members, the principal investigator

(first author), and the project manager collaboratively developed the SEL curriculum over a course of 15 meetings. Following principles of transformative SEL and TribalCrit, the curriculum includes lessons that grounded teaching of core SEL competencies within traditional values, language, culture, and land-based context. Each lesson is structured similarly in that the lessons integrate core SEL competencies and their corresponding community value (e.g., self-awareness and resiliency), a central inquiry question (e.g., How does my behavior reflect my community values?), students' learning outcomes (e.g., I will realize how the SEL program will affect and improve my personal wellness journey and my community's well-being), learning materials (e.g., the "Path to Wellness" poster, Figure 1), and personal reflections (e.g., individual journal entry). To enhance student engagement (Sun et al., 2022), the lessons incorporate many inquiry-based collaborative learning activities, such as collaborative problem-solving and discussions, besides teacher-led whole-class discussions. An outline of the SEL program piloted in this study is presented in Table 2.

The school counselor, a non-Indigenous CAB member who had worked for 4 years at the school, facilitated the implementation of the SEL program during her weekly 1-h guidance lessons. All of the students were invited to take part in the lessons, a component of the school counselor's comprehensive program every year, but they had the option to opt out of the data collection associated with the research study (e.g., journal entries). Students

completed minor assent forms and parents and educators completed consent forms, indicating permission for data collection while participating in the lessons. While participating in the SEL program, students each had an individual notebook to write or illustrate their thoughts based on specific prompts, such as "What is your definition of wellness?" (see a list of journal prompts in Table 2).

Data collection and analytic strategies

The first subquestion asked: What themes of anti-racism and anti-colonialism arose from the co-creation process of the SEL program? To address this subquestion, we analyzed the triangulated data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Liao & Hitchcock, 2018) collected from the past 3 years of the study (see Table 1). Artifacts that were used in the data analysis included (a) correspondence between university researchers and the community liaison, CAB members, and stakeholders; (b) audio recordings, videos, and transcripts of eight CAB meetings; and (c) recordings, videos, and transcripts of 15 SEL program (curriculum) co-creation meetings, and (d) researcher memos.

We engaged in five stages of analyses. In Stage I, the lead author developed a document that infused tenets of transformative SEL (e.g., communal orientation) and TribalCrit (e.g., tribal sovereignty) and distributed it to individual members of the research team. The

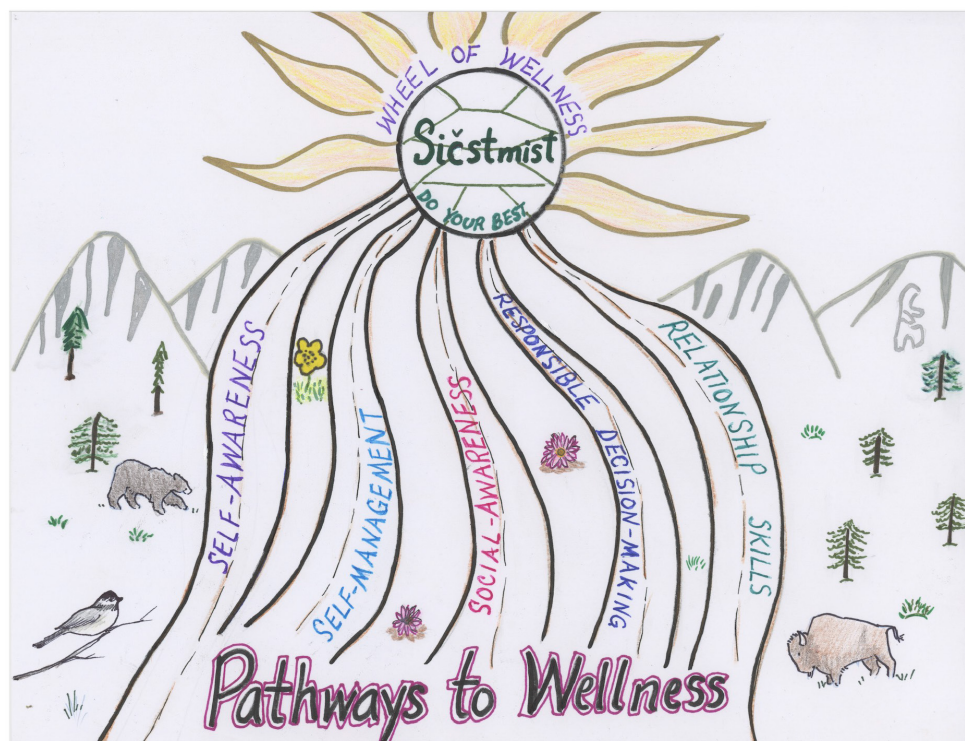


FIGURE 1 Poster of path to wellness

TABLE 2 Outline of the SEL pilot curriculum and student journal prompts

Week and lesson title	Social-emotional competency and associated traditional value	Inquiry question	Lesson outcome	Journal prompt
Week 1 Introduction	<i>Sicstmist</i> : do your best	What does wellness mean to you?	I will gain an understanding of this SEL project. I will realize how the goals of the project will affect and improve my personal wellness. I will view the entirety of the project and grasp the overall meaning with the use of the wheel and the pathway images.	What is your definition of wellness? ^a
Week 2 Identify Emotions	Self-Awareness Resiliency	What causes emotion in myself and others?	I can identify emotions in myself and others. I recognize situations or experiences that cause different emotions in myself and others.	
Week 3 Understand Body Reactions	Self-Awareness Resiliency	How does my body automatically react to different emotions?	I can appreciate how my body automatically reacts to different emotions.	I am ... ^a What do kids in your community need to be happy? ^a
Week 4 Read My Face	Social Awareness Respect	How can I tell how others are feeling?	I make observations of others and get clues on how they might be feeling. I understand how my behavior might influence others, and how others' behavior and feelings might influence mine.	
Week 5 Give Back	Relationship Skills Reciprocity, Respect	What does it mean to give back?	I understand the value of reciprocity and intentionally plan to fulfill this responsibility in all my relationships. I cooperate with others and seek and offer help when needed.	Write about an example of when you gave back to yourself, others, or our natural world. ^a
Week 6 Gatherings	Self-Management Reverence	What does <i>community</i> mean to me? How do I change my behaviors in different community settings?	I use my communication skills to help me understand behavioral expectations in different community settings.	Take a look at the community map. Then, list the <i>places</i> that give you comfortable feelings. List some <i>people</i> in your community that are most helpful. How would these people behave in these places?
Week 7 Tour our Community	Self-Management Reverence	What are considered healthy reactions to feelings? How does my behavior reflect my community values? Am I doing a good job representing myself and my family?	I identify healthy reactions as well as challenges that prevent me from reacting in healthy ways. I realize what I may change to help myself feel better.	Tell me about a time when you believed that you were treated differently than another kid. In your journal book, tell me what feelings you had when it happens. If it caused strong emotions, tell me what would have made it feel better. ^a
Week 8 Big Questions	Decision Making Responsibility	What is a Big Question? How can I make responsive decisions when facing a Big Question?	I understand different perspectives when facing a difficult situation or a dilemma. I use evidence and reasoning to support my decisions.	
Week 9 Making Decisions through Collaborative Reasoning	Decision Making Responsibility	How can I make responsive decisions through Collaborative Reasoning with others?	I understand that we will collectively come up with the most reasonable decision about complex issues, like the story we read about a girl having to choose between modern life and traditional values. I do so through careful listening, respectful collaborating, and participating in thoughtful argumentation.	Complete the story by writing a conversation between the girl and her mom. The talk should include her <i>decision and reasons</i> , as well as possibly a disagreement from her mom.

Abbreviation: SEL, social-emotional learning.

^aIndicates the four prompts for journal entries that were analyzed in this study.

team discussed the focus of analysis and each member was assigned artifacts to analyze. In Stage II, the team individually and then collectively coded the data (e.g., researcher memos, SEL curriculum development meeting notes) based on tenets from the transformative SEL and TribalCrit frameworks. Using weekly scheduled meetings, the research team engaged in rich discussion and critical reflexivity regarding the initial thematic analysis (Nicholls, 2009). This peer debriefing enhanced our credibility to report and review what was expressed through the artifacts (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). In Stage III, as a further step to identify themes, the artifacts were exchanged among the research team to account for how the collective reflexivity might influence the process of identifying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this way, individual members analyzed data and participated in the debriefing process, which brought forth deeper levels of reflection of the data.

In Stage IV, as the research team had completed the analysis with more peer debriefs, the lead author generated the most prominent themes that emerged from the Stage III analysis. That document was then shared with the team with instructions to solicitate further feedback (e.g., agreement of themes) and specific examples. Finally in Stage V, once the themes were organized and refined, two Indigenous CAB members (co-authors) who had attended almost all the CAB meetings and helped create the SEL program conducted member checking. Their feedback was further incorporated into the themes.

The second subquestion asked: How did students respond to and act on these themes as they participated in the SEL program? To address this subquestion, the research team transitioned to review the reflective journals that students wrote while learning in the SEL curriculum. Each student had responded to four prompts from the school counselor; we subsequently analyzed four journal entries per student. Each journal entry was randomly assigned to two different research team members to review for themes originally found in the first subquestion, as well as new themes that might not have been captured by subquestion 1. Additionally, 20% of the journals were viewed by a third reviewer using the same process. After the first round of analysis, the lead author synthesized themes identified from each journal entry and shared this summary document with the team. Each team member provided individual comments on the summary before the team engaged in a group discussion. From that discussion, the lead author organized and refined a summary of results to share with three CAB members for member checking, including the school counselor who piloted the SEL program and the two Indigenous CAB members who completed member checking for subquestion 1. The review feedback was integrated into the final results below.

RESULTS

We identified five themes under research subquestion 1 that were instrumental in supporting children's development of anti-racism and anti-colonialism. These themes include: (1) building a space to dream, (2) acknowledging colonization as endemic to the community, (3) reclaiming and celebrating Indigenous identity, (4) navigation of the sacred, and (5) survival as a path to wellness. We found that student journals also reflected many ideas under the five themes except for the second theme. Therefore, under each theme, we first describe how the community derived these specific ideas while co-creating the SEL program (subquestion 1), and we then present how students responded to those ideas during the SEL program (subquestion 2).

Building a space to dream

Throughout the SEL program co-creation process, the first theme arose was related to building a space for the community members to dream together and to reimagine a culturally responsive SEL program that benefits their children. Through monthly community dinner meetings held in a locally owned art gallery, the university research team gradually built a trusting relationship with CAB members. Community caterers prepared the dinners using food grown and foraged from local and native-inspired ingredients, which uniquely and culturally enhanced the relationship-building process. The art gallery exhibited both natural and cultural resources, infusing into the shared space the place-based context and community values.

CAB members Re-imagine SEL for their children

In this shared space, CAB members and the research team were building a space to dream where everyone brought in their visions of what could be possible for Indigenous students beyond standardized testing. CAB members elaborated on these visions, or as one member called it, "romantic dreams," of how education could look differently for their children. For example, members contrasted the public school with the Salish language immersion school in the community, in their different education philosophies and approaches. While the public school emphasizes academic achievement and meeting state standards, the language school is grounded in spirituality, Indigeneity, and place-based learning to support Indigenous students' growth.

This contrast in education extended to definitions and purpose of SEL. As the research team introduced the well-established CASEL model, CAB members

thoroughly examined this model and pointed out that the five social-emotional competencies did not necessarily reflect the community values or their expectations of children's behaviors. CAB members then brainstormed ways to expand the model so that it could meet the specific needs of children in their community. For instance, community members discussed how traditional values such as reciprocity should be taught as a foundation for children to understand and practice as a way to approach relationship building. They also underlined the importance of attending to spirituality and land in the SEL program, acknowledging where the school resides, the towering mountains nearby, and the flowing river that runs alongside the school.

To further explore how the CASEL model could be expanded to reflect community values, the CAB encouraged the university research team to visit the language school. When the team arrived, an Elder, children, and teachers welcomed the team with ceremony. Singing, drumming, and sage smudging, they shook everyone's hands while saying good morning in the Indigenous language. Enrolled tribal members themselves, the teachers commented on how they have used their language to instill traditional values in the students, protect their mind and spirit, build a sense of belonging and pride, and demonstrate to them the Indigenous way of knowing. Visiting the language school allowed the research team to see the community members' dream in a very concrete form, as this school embodies the goals of building strength, identity, and spirituality in the young generations from within their culture and traditions. Visiting the language school also significantly deepened the research team's understanding of the community members' compassion for their children, and their visions to challenge the existing education system and curriculum in the public school that were built on colonialism.

Students responding to the CAB's visions

Students resonated with the CAB's visions of connecting identity development and spirituality, as shown in their reflections and journal entries while participating in the SEL program. For example, in the introductory lesson when explaining what children in this community need to be happy, many older students drew images that reflected cultural symbols, such as a *tipi* (i.e., a cone-shaped tent built by Indigenous tribes in the region, drawn by a sixth-grade student). One fifth-grade student drew an elk on the journal and further elaborated, "I think we should have a class that teaches nature, and how to hunt and fish, or a class that teaches you to make clothes and have tiny *powwows* (cultural celebrations), and a class that goes on hikes or hunting." This response emulated CAB's vision of a well-rounded education for their Indigenous children by integrating the children's

experience in nature into their education in a formal setting. As co-creators of the SEL program, we envisioned the powerful impact of having such inclusiveness embraced in the public school.

Acknowledging colonization as endemic to the community

The second theme of the SEL co-creation process emphasized the role and impact of colonization within the education system, including the school for which the SEL program was created. Despite the fact that the research team had never explicitly asked the CAB about the impact of colonization, many shared personal experiences nevertheless. Their experiences revealed the extensive prevalence of racism and colonialism in the community, shown through intergenerational trauma, lack of belonging, and struggles in youth identity. Although we did not find direct evidence from student journals that spoke to these ideas, this theme laid out a critical foundation for centering Indigenous survivance in the SEL curriculum, which we will further illustrate in the third theme.

First, community members reflected on the historical and contemporary experiences of colonialism in the community. One member articulated the influence of colonization on integrational trauma, asserting that Indigenous people were deeply affected by colonization: "how we were raised in our environment because of the trauma, because of the mass genocide, because of the boarding school when they beat our grandparents for speaking the only language they knew. And then that trauma passed on to us. It's in our blood, so we struggle with that." Another CAB member described their recent experiences attending the school board meeting as being "very eye-opening" and "unwelcoming." Although the school administration has mentioned to the research team their desire to get families more involved, the CAB member shared that the way the school had been structured could make family members feel as if they "did not belong there." For example, they had to "jump many hoops, fill in lots of paperwork, and pay" in order to volunteer in the school, which was disheartening and prevented them from wanting to participate. These examples of lack of trust or belonging in the school suggested a disconnect between the school's intent and the community members' experiences.

This disconnection between intent and experiences revealed the intertwining nature of colonialism and racism. By definition, colonialism pervades the education system and subsequently perpetuates racism within the community. For instance, one member noted that "Indigenous people [can be] just as racist as any White people. But it's that colonization that happened to us, right? So, it's healing that first." This member highlighted the unique context in which Indigenous students are learning—a public school system which was developed by, and continues to

be, a colonial system, acknowledging that racism exists *because* of colonialism.

Colonialism also deeply influences youth identity. One CAB member shared a story about an Indigenous student's journey searching for her identity. The student was trying to make sense of her White presenting appearance (e.g., fair complexion, light-colored eyes, while wrestling with the fact that she was a descendent, but not an enrolled tribal member). The CAB member tried to remind the student that “you speak the language, you dance, your leadership, your involvement in the community,” but the student “doesn't feel like it” and was devastated. The CAB member further stated: “It's a law, that says she's a descendent. She is who she is. ...Yeah, there's a complex issue ... Descendent wasn't even a word with our people for a long time ... Well, I have friends whose older brother and sister are members and she and her other brother are descendants, same parents, the law changed ... That was all from the government.”

The complicated impact of colonialism on youth identity was echoed by one of the young Indigenous undergraduate research assistants on this project. She shared how she had been taking refuge in constructing performance art pieces: “And I've been working on my identity issues ... and these self-destructive thoughts I have of myself. The last one (artwork) I did was about the blood quantum thing. I feel like that really takes a toll on you as an Indigenous person, cause you feel like ‘oh I can't live up to that quantum.’ Cause I do have a tribal ID but, when I think about, ‘oh if I have a kid and it's not with somebody that's Indigenous, they wouldn't be able to enroll in that tribe, or in our tribe.’ ...I feel like the visual arts is a really good platform to take on issues like this.” Encouraged by the CAB, she brought her art to the next meeting, and she received compliments and affirmation from the CAB. As one CAB member concluded, despite how colonization has continued to impact their lives, it was essential that they combat its effect unapologetically, because “it's also about mastering our stories—because it's not about being a victim and telling our helpless stories ... It's about finding our own power.”

Reclaiming and celebrating indigenous identity

As a direct response to the second theme, the third theme captured during the SEL program co-creation process was about reclaiming and celebrating Indigenous identity within schools, that is, Indigenous survivance. This theme speaks to the community members' consistent efforts in centering Indigenous identity, pushing against racist policies and deficit views of Indigenous people, as well as their intentional use of language when co-creating the SEL program. These efforts shaped the content and structure of the SEL curriculum, which was well received by the students as they expressed pride in sharing personal and cultural identities.

CAB members centering indigenous identity in SEL

The first component of this theme was that CAB members had a strong commitment to battling against the assimilationist expectations of education for Indigenous youth. Such commitment was about challenging the dominant culture's values and norms within the school, and thus reclaiming and celebrating Indigenous identity. Comments in the CAB meetings focused on how to incorporate cultural values (e.g., nature, language, spirituality, storytelling) into education. One member, for example, shared a personal story in which a teacher told her that her son was lying, but she responded “Well, actually, he's a storyteller. And in our culture, we really value that.” She challenged the teacher's perception of her son's behavior by emphasizing—celebrating—her son's Indigenous identity. The value of stories and storytelling was underlined by another CAB member: “Children are deeply philosophical beings. They are constantly engaged with making sense of the world. And they often do so through story.” Such idea of celebrating the tradition of storytelling led to common decisions for cultivating oration in the SEL program, where “we're telling the kids how valuable it is to tell stories and how to do so.” By “incorporating storytelling into the curriculum,” children will be given invaluable opportunities to “express creativity of making their own stories and appreciate the value of honoring words that come from other people.” Besides storytelling, lessons and activities that specially address other community values, such as reciprocity—being able to give back to oneself, others, and the land, were purposefully integrated into the SEL curriculum.

The second component of this theme speaks to the intentional choice of language, as language is not only a communication tool, but contributes to the layered context for children's identity development. Too often, researchers describe Indigenous children and the narrative of their communities through a deficit-oriented or problem-focused lens. Such lenses perpetuate the colonial view of Indigenous communities as broken and victimized, and relays a negative message to the young generation that they are problems to be fixed. One community member disliked a publication that focused on “weaknesses and faults” and accentuated that “...kids aren't damaged. They aren't flawed, really. It's making the school district understand how to work with them in a way that's healthier.” Members reminded us that “language is powerful, but the meanings can change the structure of how they are used,” and how “people create these terms depending on what their opinion is in the moment and the emotion gets encapsulated.” The co-created SEL curriculum thus targeted at explicit teaching vocabulary and expanding children's knowledge, providing them with the tools to identify emotions that are often entangled with their daily experiences, and to understand nuanced differences among the words that they choose to express themselves and to search for balance.

Intentional use of words also applied to community members' incorporating Indigenous words that reflect the core community values, such as reciprocity and reverence, into the SEL curriculum. Indigenous words connect directly to the sacred, as explained further in the next theme of navigation of the sacred, and thus brings in regenerating power to heal and celebrate youth identity. One CAB member used to teach Salish (the Indigenous language) in the public school and she described her reactions to students' comments that it is a "dead language:" "I'd tell them, no, it is not a dead language. You know, it's the very first language that this piece of land has ever heard. Salish has the nurturing and healing power that no other languages have."

Students expressing positive personal and cultural identities

Students responded enthusiastically to the CAB's ideas on reclaiming and celebrating Indigenous identity. Throughout the SEL lesson, students learned to identify and express emotions, as well as learned the Indigenous words related to their values and culture. Many decided to employ such knowledge and words in their journal responses. When responding to an open prompt "I am ...," students chose a wide variety of positive adjectives to describe themselves across third to six grades (e.g., brave, confident, funny, kind), demonstrating a strong positive perception of personal identity. Besides, many children also illustrated a robust sense of collective identity, associating their own identities with the community. Students reflected on their bonding with their Elders fondly, with one fifth-grade student writing, "I am careful for Elders because I love elders because they are fun and amazing."

Additionally, as students became more aware of their cultural heritage through the self-awareness lessons of the SEL curriculum, a few students further expressed their desire for more culture elements in the school to feel a sense of fulfillment. For example, one sixth-grade student drew the surrounding mountains on the journal and expressed joy in spending time there. Another fifth-grade student recommended the school to incorporate activities such as hunting, fishing, and powwows into the curriculum. Taken together, these journals showed that students were gaining tools (e.g., language and knowledge) to identify and express themselves through the SEL lessons, while also being able to reflect on their cultural strength and collective identity.

Navigation of the sacred

Extending the third theme's connection with Indigenous language, the fourth theme referred to the CAB navigating the sacred elements of Indigenous culture that

includes land, history, values, songs, and stories while dreaming and co-creating the SEL program. This theme also speaks to the community members' cautious efforts toward reducing the potential for cultural appropriation. Students responded to these ideas by sharing perspectives about belonging and engagement while learning their traditional values.

CAB members navigating the sacred while reducing cultural appropriation

First, CAB members navigated the sacred through careful surveying of the land, stories, history, and values as they dreamed about a better education for their children and co-created the SEL program to realize this dream. Members contributed their ideas of the sacred, such as including curriculum materials that follow the cycle of seasons, supporting children's connection to the land through guided walks, or leveraging resources by creating a community map. These ideas were proposed with a vision to educate and immerse all the students in navigating the sacred, so that their spirits and identity can be nourished.

One CAB member who worked at the Indigenous language school for 1 year expressed how much they missed hearing the children sing, and wished singing can be incorporated into the SEL program. She further explained: "singing is prayer, singing is joy, and I think joy is spiritual, so there are things that we can do with kids that nourish their spirit like singing and laughter. I mean, there are things that we can do and assets in the community that we can bring in that nourish kids' spirits, because sometimes schools or classes seem kind of joyless to me."

Second, community members navigated the sacred through cautious efforts in reducing the potential for cultural appropriation. During several meetings, there was a continual tension between acknowledging the importance of integrating cultural traditions into the SEL program and cautiously weighing the potential for non-Indigenous educators to teach these cultural traditions in the classroom. For example, one member commented on the "outsider nature" of many non-Indigenous educators in the school, and was concerned that "They don't understand necessarily culturally what's going on and some of the difficulties and historical context, let alone to be very sensitive to that. It's a paramount issue that seems to not get really talked about a lot." The theme of navigating the sacred meant recognizing that many educators within the school were not Indigenous, and teaching the lessons on cultural elements may not only be inappropriate, but also harmful. One community member illustrated how Indigenous words could be taught to help understand the meaning behind the story, but noting "I also want super careful monitor of that, because some of

the teachers do not necessarily have Salish background and are not Indigenous. We don't want to have, you know, appropriation of our culture.” These discussions highlighted the importance that educators facilitating the SEL program, particularly those who were non-Indigenous, should respect the stories and teachings.

Cultural appropriation is an imperative discussion when developing culturally responsive programs with Indigenous communities, as it reflects the ongoing settler colonialism within the dominant culture. As one CAB member asked, “How can we use traditional story in a way that honors tribal sovereignty and history?” One way to reduce the potential of cultural appropriation is to allow more Indigenous community members involved in co-creating the SEL program and providing guidance and feedback, such as local and Indigenous artists, translators, writers, and Elders from the Culture Committee. Another way to reduce the danger of cultural appropriation, especially for non-Indigenous educators who are less familiar with the sacredness of Indigenous culture, is to immerse them in place-based and meticulous learning of local culture and to build trust (Prest & Goble, 2018). In our project, the school counselor, a non-Indigenous CAB member, had been immersed in learning about the community and its culture through observing and participating in the co-creation process. As she prepared to facilitate the program, she humbly commented: “Oh man you guys, I almost feel like I am not worthy to be doing this.” She was aware of the great responsibility she had in facilitating the program in a way that the community members desired, that decolonized the existing approach to SEL, and that leveraged the strengths to support Indigenous children. She acknowledged the critical role that she has played in navigating the sacred to support her students in a more culturally responsive way.

Student experiencing engagement and belonging through learning the sacred

Our analysis of student journals showed that students formed a strong sense of belonging through learning about the sacred in the SEL program. After having learned about reciprocity, a traditional value that means “I take and give back,” students wrote how they could practice this value and show respect and honor to keep things in balance and harmony. When discussing how to give back to *oneself*, such as getting sufficient sleep, eating healthy meals, and being kind, many third- and fourth-grade students often explained how this form of reciprocity not only enhanced their own school engagement, but also benefited *others*. For example, students recognized that taking care of themselves allows them to be fully present and attend to people around them, as one third-grade student articulated: “Taking care of yourself is important because when you take care of yourself, you're happy, calm,

kind, and that makes others happy like you! (It's) like giving kindness.”

Compared to younger students (third and fourth graders) who primarily wrote about reciprocity to themselves and others, older students (fifth and sixth graders) spent more time discussing how they could give back to nature. Their ideas ranged from picking up trash and recycling, to planting trees and pulling weeds to give native plants their space. Many shared their compassion for nature: “My favorite place to be is riding my horse in the mountains” and “I love to be next to the Jocko River. You can bring offerings when you take something.” These fifth- and sixth-grade students saw themselves as responsible and capable of taking care of nature, as one wrote “there is a lot of plants across the creek, so I help water them and take care of them.” Combining students' views of reciprocity across the self, others, and nature levels, their journals demonstrated how practicing traditional values such as reciprocity helped children build school engagement and a sense of belonging and connectedness with others and their community.

Survivance as a path to wellness

The final theme that emerged from our analyses captured the idea that survivance is a path to wellness. This theme not only shaped the co-creation process of the community-engaged, culturally responsive SEL, but also was reinforced through the content of the SEL curriculum. While participating in the SEL program, students perceived wellness from a communal orientation and also asserted agency in their path to wellness, key aspects of Indigenous survivance. Distinct from survival, *survivance* is moving beyond the basic survival confronting overwhelming cultural genocide and erasure to create spaces of synthesis and renewal.

Community forging the path to wellness

Path to wellness was the community members' central message to students participating in this SEL program. Community members who co-created the program repeatedly underscored this message: The goal of the entire project was to dream a path to wellness for their Indigenous children. To deliver this message to students, community members and the research team co-created a poster that represented the path. Several community members who had not been directly involved in this project, including the elementary school's art teacher and the project manager's artist sister, were invited by the CAB to join the co-creation process. The process of creating this poster (titled “Path to Wellness,” see [Figure 1](#)) was collaborative, lengthy, iterative, and ultimately represented the community: the Mission Mountains as a backdrop, featuring bitterroot flowers (a beloved Indigenous plant

that was gifted to the people to prevent them from starvation), “the dancing boy” (an image that surfaces on the mountains after snowfall, resembling a boy dancing), the sun with turtle shell pattern (representing Indigenous medicine, longevity, and endurance), and an Indigenous word at the center (*Sicstmist*) that means “do your best.”

Path to Wellness was one of many examples that embodied the community's efforts in creating a land-based, community-oriented curriculum that aimed to help children celebrate their identity, deepen a sense of belonging, and further connect with the land and the community. It supported children in developing social and emotional competencies that align with their Indigenous values. This co-creation process was a powerful act of survivance because it involves individuals across the community to collaborate. Such collaboration draws on the strength, values, and perspectives that each individual brings in. These individuals include the Tribal Council Chairwoman, Elders from the Culture Committee, leaders who facilitated youth horse and hunting camps, and members of the tribal college's Institution Review Board, all of whom are shouldered different responsibilities in serving their children. The co-created SEL curriculum thus naturally embodies the spirit of survivance and self-preservation.

Students perceiving the path to wellness with a communal orientation and agency

Responding to the community members' focus on the path to wellness, students' reflections in their journals highlighted the theme of wellness with a communal orientation. When prompted to consider how they defined wellness, most students conceptualized *wellness* as being related to healthy and positive relationships with others, including friends, family, and teammates. Indeed, students from third to sixth grades revealed a deep sense of communal orientation based on which they considered their attitudes toward others (e.g., be kind, be responsible, be respectful) and specific actions that they could take to support others (e.g., helping one's teammates or friends). Students' responses highlighted that they naturally took a communal orientation when conceptualizing wellness, which is tied with their cultural values. Such communal orientation is in contrast to the typical acquisitive individualism orientation that is dominant within U.S. cultural institutions including schools.

Besides viewing wellness with a communal orientation, students asserted agency to confront obstacles while walking on the path to wellness. When asked to reflect on a time when they believed that they were treated differently than another child, students primarily described two types of situations. The first type was related to them not receiving the same rewards as siblings or peers did, or being the only one got punished despite others had similar behavior (e.g., “One time during lunch we got in trouble, everyone had to be quiet but the teachers

still let the girls talk and just acted like they didn't notice it.”). The second type referred to being excluded. For example, one student shared her frustration when she was told that “girls did not belong in the car shop” when she was working on a car there. She further wrote “I was really mad when he said that I didn't belong out there. I thought that he was wrong and that just because I'm a girl doesn't mean I don't belong.” In addition to expressing such strong emotions like anger and sadness, many students explicitly voiced their concerns for unfairness (e.g., “I felt unfair and I thought that she should do the rest.”), and questioned the reasons for such unfair treatment (e.g., “My thoughts were why? Why?”).

While brainstorming what could have made it feel better, many students used tools taught in the SEL program to act more proactively. While some chose to use calming strategies such as “reading a book,” “snuggling with my bear,” others decided to communicate explicitly to the people who treated them differently to understand what had happened and air their expectations to be treated equally. Relating to their sentiment toward nature, quite a few students explained how they would seek comfort in the nature to regroup themselves (e.g., “I would go outside behind my house there are woods and a little bit of water ... I go to the water because it makes me feel safe and it relaxes me.”). Finally, some students proposed ways to avoid getting into similarly undesirable situation again in the future, involving adults to be advocates (e.g., “I would change the teachers to learn to help.”). Overall, they asserted a sense of agency in coping with obstacles such as being treated differently and taking actions to confront the situation.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current study was to understand how to support Indigenous children's development of anti-racism and anti-colonialism through co-creating a SEL program with an Indigenous community. Grounded in tribal critical race theory (Brayboy, 2005) and transformative SEL (Jagers et al., 2019), we specifically focused on Indigenous survivance, centering Indigenous culture, identity, agency, and belonging. By engaging the Indigenous community in co-creating and piloting a transformative SEL program for their Indigenous children, this study challenged the existing educational systems that are based in White supremacy and settler-colonialism. Besides, given the limited research in children's development of anti-racism and anti-colonialism, our study's focus on middle childhood further addressed the gaps in the literature about this age group.

Indigenous identity and survivance

The results of the current study revealed five themes that were interconnected, while also showing a clear

progression from community gathering knowledge of the multi-layered contexts where Indigenous children develop, to taking action in supporting the development of anti-racism and anti-colonialism in Indigenous children. Indeed, these themes form the basis of an understanding of how a transformative SEL program could be developed to focus on Indigenous identity, ensuring that children's learning and well-being are centered in place-based existence.

For example, communal orientation to identity development—a key aspects of transformative SEL (Jagers et al., 2019)—was highlighted in both the SEL program co-creation process and the student journals. Research has shown that a communal orientation is associated with positive outcomes for youth from minoritized groups that include Latinx, Asian American, and African American youth (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). These positive outcomes involve reduced psychological distress and risky behavior, enhanced school engagement, and a sense of belonging. Additionally, the themes identified in this study were related to both personal and collective identities, an important aspect of self-concept among Indigenous youth (Whitesell et al., 2006). For example, Whitesell et al. (2006) found that among American Indian adolescents, community-mindedness was strongly related to their Indigenous cultural identity rather than their Euro-American identity.

In addition to supporting Indigenous identity development, the five themes were also tied with Indigenous survivance. Survivance means thriving and flourishing; it refers to the ways that Indigenous peoples have always been (Vizenor, 2009). Standing in stark contrast to the image of being absent, victimized, damaged, and broken—an image of how Indigenous communities are typically portrayed (Tuck, 2009), survivance features Indigenous courage, intelligence, determination, creativity, and artfulness (Sabzalian, 2019). Indigenous survivance, therefore, is not simply surviving the centuries of harm by settler colonialists; rather, it is active resistance through critical consciousness and radical healing. Survivance is an opposition to colonialism and racism. Survivance is full presence of life.

To promote Indigenous children's survivance during middle childhood, results from our study highlighted the importance of active resistance against colonial scripts and reclaiming and celebrating Indigenous identity through embedding protective factors in SEL, such as the sacred culture, lands, and traditional values. Beyond common measures of academic performance, the “meaningful integration of Indigenous cultural content into the curriculum, student self-concept, and in-depth community engagement” (Ewing & Ferrick, 2012, p. 4) is critical for children to experience success and a sense of belonging in a space.

Students in our study responded positively to the sacred elements presented in the SEL program and exhibited a sense of pride of their identity, as well as belonging

and engagement in schools. This finding is consistent with prior research on the positive impact of programs adopting culture-specific philosophy to support African American youth's endorsement of Afrocentric values and positive ethnic racial identity development (Loyd & Williams, 2017). This finding also aligns with other conceptual models, such as the Indigenist Stress-Coping model, which highlights the protective role of cultural buffers (e.g., family, community, spiritual coping, identity attitudes) for Indigenous people to cope with traumatic stressors and to promote resilience and positive health outcomes (Walters et al., 2002). Our study adds further evidence to how engaging Indigenous communities throughout the entire research process can amplify such cultural buffers while reducing cultural appropriation, leading to positive changes in the multi-layered contexts from school to community for Indigenous children's development.

We noticed that among students in this middle childhood developmental group, there were some differences in their responses to these SEL lessons. For example, when responding to prompts related to reciprocity, a traditional value emphasized in the relationship-building lessons, younger students (third and fourth graders) tended to focus on giving back to selves as a way to give back to others, while older students (sixth graders) primarily focused on giving back to nature. Thus, future research may examine how belonging and identity are shaped differentially even within this developmental period.

Transformative SEL for anti-colonialism and anti-racism

The current study also advances scholarship on using transformative SEL to support Indigenous children's development of anti-racism and anti-colonialism at both individual and systems levels. Besides promoting social and emotional competencies, transformative SEL mitigates the educational, social, and economic inequities among Indigenous children. It aims to inspire both children and adults to be critically aware of the legacies of racialized cultural oppression and equip them with tools to fight against such oppression in schools, communities, and the broader society (Jagers et al., 2019). Our study has directly demonstrated how such ambitious goals of transformative SEL can be accomplished through community engagement at both individual and systems levels. At the individual level, the inclusion and partnership of community members in creating this SEL program serves to strengthen students' connections to their Indigenous values and SEL competencies. At the systems level, the partnership established in this study also provides the community an avenue for combating racism and colonialism that have been weaved into the educational systems in tribal nations. The community

has been further empowered in identifying their strengths and values, and subsequently, forging a path to wellness for their children.

Results of our study also provide specific examples of how to embed cultural and racial literacy within the SEL curriculum to promote social justice and development of anti-racism for children (Loe, 2020). Our analyses of the co-creation process revealed that we had to acknowledge that not only colonialism was endemic to this community, but that racist policies and structures were built to justify colonization's continued impact on Indigenous children today. This acknowledgment also pushed the community members and university researchers to focus on strengths of the culture, traditions, and beliefs of the community to build a space to reclaim and celebrate Indigenous identity and survivance. Ultimately, the community members recognized that in order to build a path to wellness for their children, they had to co-create a program that celebrated their identity and language, and challenged the existing models of SEL to be culturally grounded, land-based, and community-engaged.

Furthermore, our study highlighted that for transformative SEL to address issues such as power, privilege, and social justice, such programs have to evolve with a clear understanding that colonialism is endemic to society. For example, the legislated identities for many Indigenous children, such as tribal membership or blood quantum, have been regulated through arbitrary, yet systematic, efforts by the government to meet their own interests and erase Indigenous identity (Smith et al., 2019). It is thus important to help children navigate their identities through carefully guided discussions that allow them to understand the complexity and historical events that have contributed to its complexity. Such care and consideration echo the humanization that Camangian and Cariaga (2021) argued as most important for students of color, who deserve self-love and solidarity, rather than systematically imposed self-hate, divide, and conquer.

Advancing anti-racist research in developmental science

We want to emphasize how this community-engaged research study is a process of challenging the current colonial systems in academia in itself. Research studies in child development, like much of research in psychology and education broadly, have historically been conducted by White researchers (Buchanan et al., 2021) and focused on White children (García Coll, 2005). Scholars (e.g., Quintana et al., 2006) have highlighted the importance of understanding the sociocultural variables in children's development and have emphasized the use of cultural validity in the conceptual framework, measurement, findings, and interpretation of

studies. Yet, there is a lack of research focusing on how colonialism fits within these variables. Furthermore, Indigenous scholars have noted that current research methodologies do not align with Indigenous knowledge and culture. They advocate for research methodologies that advances “collaborative research that is inclusive of communities' voices, revitalizes and restores lost identities and value systems, and legitimizes knowledge as content and as body of thinking” (Chilisa, 2020; p. 28). These types of methodologies may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable for child development researchers. In order to conduct anti-colonial and anti-racist research, however, we argue that community voices must be included in research.

Additionally, we employed qualitative research methodology—an approach not typically used in developmental science—to reveal distinct themes related to anti-colonialism efforts in the transformative SEL program. This type of methodology was critical to explore deeper meanings in the co-creation process and to understand students' experiences and reflections related to anti-colonialism. However, the qualitative research methodology and our study's focus on Indigenous children both differ from the existing research landscape of developmental science. It is surprising that there is only a handful of studies in *Child Development* that focus on Indigenous children specifically. Even among those studies, most used Western, Eurocentric approaches focusing on deficits, rather than focusing on strengths and survivance. If the field is truly going to work toward anti-racism, developmental science may need to move away from Western epistemologies and methodologies and be open to other research approaches, such as Indigenous research methods (e.g., Smith et al., 2019) and knowledge systems that center the global majority or people of color in a way that is “healing, authentic, and liberatory” (Lee et al., 2021). Our study shows that, with Indigenous peoples becoming co-researchers and foregrounding their values and voices, Indigenous research methodologies can be a powerful tool to promote anti-racism and anti-colonialism research.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, our study advances the current scholarship on anti-racism, and particularly anti-colonialism, within developmental science. This special section of *Child Development* sought to target studies on anti-racism; however, when working within Indigenous communities, the target must also be on anti-colonialism. As Brayboy (2005) emphasized in tribal critical race theory, colonization precedes racism; therefore, any anti-racism efforts must first acknowledge and address colonization. The findings of this study revealed the extent to which colonialism continues to pervade the education systems. More encouragingly, the study demonstrated how members of an Indigenous community

challenged these systems by striving to integrate their traditions and values into an innovative and transformative SEL program. Furthermore, the students themselves recognized the importance of tradition, recommending that their teachers weave nature and tradition into their school curriculum.

This exploratory study was conducted within a unique context that included one Indigenous community and a relatively small number of children from the public school. Despite its intrinsic limitations, our study pushed boundaries regarding how to co-create and conceptualize transformative SEL for Indigenous students. It sheds light on our understanding of how to support Indigenous children's survivance through promoting their development of anti-racism and anti-colonialism.

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