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# Collaboratively teaching Myaamia color systems and contemporary digital practices within a reciprocal partnership

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ABSTRACT
In this article, one Indigenous author and two settler authors examine the impact on preservice educators of a collaborative curricular experience intended to challenge the settler imaginary, within the context of a longstanding community-engaged Tribe-university partnership. This curricular experience involved collaboration with Indigenous scholars and artists, discussion of Indigenous artmaking in a contemporary new-media context, and centering of Indigenous language and epistemology in curriculum development. The collaboration is a complex form of community-engaged practice and public pedagogy that aims to serve local communities of elementary learners, an Indigenous community connected to this locality, and preservice educators. The authors describe the context and community-engaged methodology of this inquiry, then delineate key concepts and concerns shaping their analysis, before highlighting emergent themes and takeaways encountered in analysis of preservice educators' teaching and reflection. The authors conclude with suggestions for future inquiry as well as potential pedagogical applications for readers interested in critically and sensitively engaging with the work of contemporary Indigenous artists in their curricula.

KEYWORDS: indigenizing curriculum; Indigenous epistemology; digital artmaking; community-engaged practice; contemporary Indigenous art

After teaching a digital art lesson to area youth, developed in collaboration with local Indigenous scholars and artists, one junior white settler preservice educator, "Tracy,"[1] wrote this reflection from her own elementary education (in 2013) on an early arts-integrated learning experience addressing Indigenous cultures:

> I felt my heart sink as I read my fourth-grade teacher's comment on the rubric for my final project in our Native American unit: "Teepees, wigwams, and longhouses would not have been in the same village."
>
> My inner artist deflated as I gazed at the diorama I had poured my heart and soul into. *Well, I knew that!* I thought. But my overachieving self wanted to show I could create all of them. Instead of focusing on just one, I had ambitiously attempted to depict all three. My intent was to display different villages together, but on the surface, it had morphed into a strange, mega-hybrid village.
>
> At the time, I was far more invested in the artistic side of the project than its historical accuracy. I enjoyed handcrafting the polymer clay garden and creating the fresh-scented, blue shampoo river–proof of my creativity. I wasn't as concerned with the content itself. But after all, this was a social studies class, not an art class. Maybe they aren't meant to be combined…

This vignette highlights a number of key curricular concerns that we explore in this article. That this vignette focuses on students making art about Indigenous people in a history-integration context (rather than a science-integration lesson, or a lesson on contemporary art) reflects the norm that Indigenous people are often framed as past people, rather than contemporary people, in American state-defined curricula (Rampey et al., 2021; Shear et al., 2015). Such characterization also occurs in museum settings where Indigenous peoples and their objects are frequently exhibited as "living fossils," ahistorically and eternally primitive artifacts of "natural history" (Wintle, 2016, p. 1497), rather than as contemporary artists producing culture that may be exhibited in contemporary art collections. The fact that Tracy was making art *about* Indigenous people without learning about contemporary art *made by* Indigenous people reflects a lack of representation of contemporary Indigenous artists in art institutions. As one example, in a recently-published dataset of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA)'s complete collection (MOMA, 2025), only 0.13% of 21st -century works of art, and only 0.62% of 21st-century works of digital art are by artists identified as Native American.

1 All participant names are pseudonyms.

Later in her reflection, Tracy wrote that:

> In the past, I could recall surface-level lessons I had experienced as a child, but none of them made an effort to teach me about contemporary Indigenous culture. Instead, they selectively appropriated elements and applied them inaccurately, much like I had done with my fourth-grade diorama.

Here, she identifies the development of curriculum as a creative act analogous to her childhood artmaking, and recognizes that both creative acts are susceptible to the harmful distortions of an imaginary shaped within a settler-colonial context. In this article, we examine the impact on preservice educators of a collaborative curricular experience intended to challenge the settler imaginary, within the context of a longstanding Tribe-university partnership. This curricular experience involved collaboration with Indigenous scholars and artists, discussion of Indigenous artmaking in a contemporary new-media context, and centering of Indigenous language and epistemology in curriculum development. The collaboration is a complex form of community-engaged practice and public pedagogy that aims to serve local communities of elementary learners, an Indigenous community connected to this locality, and preservice educators. Following this introduction, we describe the context and methodology of this inquiry. We then delineate key concepts and concerns shaping our analysis, before highlighting emergent themes and takeaways encountered in analysis of preservice educators' teaching and reflection. We then conclude with suggestions for future inquiry as well as potential pedagogical applications for the reader.

## Contextualizing this Work

This research and teaching inquiry was conducted in the context of a longstanding reciprocal partnership between the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and Miami University (MU), and, more specifically, the Myaamia Arts and Culture Education Partnership, a collaboration between the Myaamia Center (the research arm of the Miami Tribe, headquartered on MU campus) and the MU art education program, which began in 2017. We have detailed the history of these collaborations in prior publications (Fox & Danker, 2023; Meeken et al., 2025). Since 2017, Miami University art education students have collaborated with the Myaamia Center to develop and teach curricula in area public schools. In Fall 2023, the collaboration expanded, with the addition of author Luke

Meeken[2], to include sophomores in the *Elementary Art Methods* course alongside juniors in the *Art Across the Curriculum* course. Sophomores taught fourth-graders about Myaamia[3] ribbonwork, integrating art and history standards. Juniors developed new curricula for fifth and sixth grades. Fifth-graders focused on the work of Myaamia weaver Jared Nally, learning about weaving techniques and indigenous plant materials. Sixth-graders focused on cultural revitalization, studying contemporary Myaamia artists and creating drawings inspired by Myaamia concepts of *neepwaantiinki* 'learning from each other' and *eemamwiciki* 'Myaamia awakening (revitalization).'

Due to the expansion of the collaboration, the Fall 2024 cohort of *Art Across the Curriculum* saw the first time that the preservice educators started the semester having already collaborated on Myaamia curriculum, since they had done so in *Elementary Art Methods* the year before. The class was divided into three groups, each teaching a different grade-level. One group focused on teaching a digital art lesson to sixth-graders, and this group of six junior preservice educators is the focus of this inquiry.

Based on feedback from the Fall 2023 sixth-grade group and in collaboration with Danker and Meeken, Fox recommended using Ohio learning standards for technology. The group chose to focus their lesson on the artwork of contemporary Myaamia artist Megan Sekulich, and utilized a learning resource Sekulich and Fox had created earlier for Myaamia youth about colors and shapes (Figure 1). The lesson tasked sixth-graders with creating digital artwork that represented their understanding of color from the perspectives of Myaamia, German[4], and American cultures. The curriculum foregrounded Myaamia color epistemology - how colors are identified, understood, and named - and semiotics - the cultural meanings commonly attached to colors (Shea, 2024).

2 Of this core triad, Kristina Fox is a citizen of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, and Meeken and Danker are both white settlers. Our positional relationships to this work are elaborated in personal narratives in prior writing (Meeken et al., 2025).

3 On the usage of the terms Miami and Myaamia: Myaamia, most often used as an adjective in English construction, is how the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma refers to the people and aspects of their culture (e.g. 'Myaamia artwork,' or 'Myaamia citizens'). Miami is an Anglicized version of Myaamia most often used in official English-language naming, such as the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, a sovereign Nation recognized by the United States Government, or Miami, OK, the city where the tribe's seat of government is located (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, 2012).

4 The host school for this lesson was a public German-language school offering bilingual education in German and English.

**Figure 1**
*A Myaamia language handout created in June 2023 illustrating the color gradients addressed by each color word in Myaamiaataweenki.*


*Note:* Image created by Megan Sekulich and Kristina Fox, and used with permission of the creators.

This partnership involves many levels and types of mentoring. There are three areas of mentorship within the program: Indigenous mentorship, non-Indigenous Myaamia-Center-affiliated mentorship, and art education mentorship. Indigenous mentorship from the Myaamia

Center throughout the curricular collaboration involved our lead and long-standing collaborator, Myaamia Education Coordinator Kristina Fox, as well as contemporary artist and Graphic Designer Megan Sekulich, and Director of Education George Ironstrack. A non-Indigenous linguist and a non-Indigenous historian from the Myaamia Center provided additional mentorship for the curriculum. While Danker facilitated the structure and organization for the *Art Across the Curriculum* class, Meeken provided mentorship for educational technology and digital art methods for the lessons.

Recently, with the expansion of the partnership and the extension of the program spanning two consecutive fall semesters for preservice educators, there are implications for expanding into areas of co-mentorship (Bona et al, 1995). For example, peer mentorship between the preservice educators who taught the lessons in Fall 2024 and the ones who will teach in Fall 2025. Mutual accountability in working toward a task together has potential to provide deeper and more meaningful opportunities for learning than what could happen alone. It is an active and iterative process of leading and following.

## Myaamia-Engaged Scholarship

Within the context of this collaboration, our methodological and theoretical framework is one of Myaamia-engaged scholarship (Shriver, 2022). We have unpacked the qualities of Myaamia-engaged scholarship in greater detail in prior writing (Meeken et al., 2025), but in brief, it is a refinement of the model of community-engaged scholarship articulated by Saulteaux-Cree education scholar Margaret Kovach (2021) that explicitly centers the values and needs of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, who are among the original stewards of the land where this research and teaching occurs.

Kovach (2021) stressed the importance of relationality and community-specificity in research, and the research and teaching described in this article extend from a particular partnership between the Myaamia Center and the Miami University art education program which centers reciprocity as a value. Specifically, this research and teaching collaboration seeks to leverage the labor of settler educators (including authors Meeken and Danker, and the settler-majority population of preservice educators in their classes) to educate settler-majority populations of area youth in ways that benefit the Miami Tribe without diverting time and labor from Myaamia educators' primary goals of educating Myaamia community. Our framing of Myaamia-engaged scholarship also means that, while we draw on concepts and frameworks from varied Indigenous scholars to inform this work, ultimately our work is framed through, and in consultation with, Myaamia perspectives.

Within this methodological framework, our primary method of data collection was prompting written reflections from preservice teachers using Pinar's (1975, 2004) conception of *currere*. Our collaborative work centers Myaamia concerns while needing to address the particular challenges and liabilities of settler educators. The currere process, with its explicitly transformative focus on past, present, and future practice, was instrumental in Danker's own unlearning process as a settler educator coming to this work (Danker & Bradshaw, 2022). It has consequently served as a valuable tool in her classes for prompting reflection in settler preservice educators regarding how they were mis-educated in the past and may transform their pedagogies in the future.

The unlearning of prior mis-education connects this work to *public pedagogy,* one of the themes of this journal issue. While community-engaged scholarship and pedagogy focus on a particular context, public pedagogy has a larger remit, engaging with the wide variety of teaching and learning that occur in non-school settings such as the Internet, popular culture, museums, parks, and civic and commercial spaces (Burdick et al., 2010). In particular, this work connects with Giroux's (2004) articulation of public pedagogy, which emphasized the ways novel technologies enable novel vectors of (mis)education, and which framed higher education spaces as vital arenas for addressing systemic and harmful miseducation being propagated by popular and commercial (and, we might add, settler) culture. While the teaching and research in this article unfolded across multiple conventional education settings - college and elementary-school classrooms - it addresses children's and preservice teachers' miseducation about Indigenous people by an enormous system of settler public pedagogy. The idea of Indigenous people as a solely past-tense people, who lived pre-scientific and pre-technological lives, is a harmful myth perpetuated in museums (Wintle, 2016), art history (Orr et al., 2019; Rickard, 2016), national iconography (Fling, 2020), sports mascots (Bergmark & Danker, 2022), and children's popular culture (Illuminative, 2022; Stokely, 2017). Beyond the issues with state standards for curriculum in schools described earlier in this article, American miseducation about the contemporaneity of Indigenous people is also a problem of public pedagogy.

## Centering Myaamia Concerns, Concepts, and Colors

In the work described in this article, we have made an effort to not only center Myaamia values and needs in curricular collaboration, but to center Myaamia epistemology, specifically in the treatment and discussion of culturally-specific understandings of color. Unangaŝ scholar Eve Tuck and settler scholars Kate McCoy and Marcia McKenzie (2014) argued that pedagogues must disrupt "settler zero point epistemologies – those epistemologies that deny other perspectives and truths"

(p. 3). These scholars described how a specific European scientific episteme - a way of organizing sensory information and defining what counts as knowledge - has been asserted globally through colonization, displacing and devaluing diverse, complex, and place-relevant Indigenous modes of sensing and understanding. Kovach (2021) has argued that European zero point epistemology has done more than displace Indigenous epistemologies, allowing settler cultures to frame convenient cultural concepts such as eugenic survival of the fittest and racial essentialism as fundamental scientific truths. Such truths, in turn, were used to justify eliminationist and white supremacist settler-colonial projects across the globe (Kovach, 2021; Wolfe, 2006).

Tuck et al. (2014) specifically cited language work as a tool for decentering settler zero point epistemology by articulating nuanced place-specific knowledges that English does not as readily convey. Because language revitalization is a core activity of contemporary Myaamia cultural education work (Ironstrack & Burke, 2022), Myaamia language plays a key role in the curricular collaboration of the Myaamia Arts and Culture Education Partnership. By leveraging *Myaamiaataweenki* 'Miami language' as a distinct way of articulating contemporary experiences, the curriculum that stems from this collaboration has a valuable tool for decentering settler zero point epistemology.

The project discussed in this paper focuses on color as a site for this decentering work. Far from an innocuous formal quality, color, and specifically the way it is often taught in PK-12 art curricula, reflects a settler zero point mode of knowledge production. Olivia Gude (2000, 2001) famously observed how art teachers speak "in the language of scientific certainty" (p. 45) when teaching about color - notably describing how teachers not only frame the formal color theory of Albers and Itten (usually in the form of color wheels) as scientific and universal, but also frame culturally-specific semantic associations with colors (e.g. blue = sad) as essential and universal. While Gude was writing a quarter-century ago, the first-page results of a Google search for "K-12 color art lesson" still yield exclusively lesson ideas for variations on Johannes Itten color wheels and worksheets illustrating that yellow=happiness, white=purity, and black=edginess (e.g. Lowe, 2018). Returning to Tuck et al.'s (2014) focus on language work, and our own focus on Myaamia-engaged scholarship, when the preservice educators began developing a lesson on color, language, and technology, we saw an opportunity to decenter sensory and semiotic settler color epistemologies by scaffolding preservice educators with Myaamia language for articulating colors and their associated meanings.

Anthropologist Brent Berlin and linguist Paul Kay (1969) extensively documented the ways different languages divide the visible spectrum

into different numbers of what they called basic color terms (e.g., in English, red, blue, green, etc.). However, Berlin and Kay arguably succumbed to the totalizing mentality of zero point epistemology, positing a developmental model where languages/cultures with fewer *basic color terms* were deemed less mature/advanced. Their perspective has since been critiqued (e.g. Levinson, 2000; Saunders, 2000), highlighting how Berlin and Kay's cultural biases impacted their collection and analysis of data, and how their model failed to acknowledge context-specific ways color information is communicated outside of basic color terms. However, Berlin and Kay's model still enjoys popular support, for example being featured in a 2017 video essay by Vox which has garnered 7.8 million views (Vox, 2017). Careful attention to the way settler epistemology shapes discourses around language and color is especially important in our work, as Myaamiaataweenki color terms often cover a wider gradient of colors than individual English terms. Myaamiaataweenki also locates some color nuances outside of basic color terms, connecting specific hues to specific local materials. For example, the verb phrase *oonsaaweeki* 'it is yellow' covers hues that in English may be described as yellow, copper, orange, and brown, but the related Myaamiaataweenki noun *oonsaalamooni* 'bloodroot' describes the bloodroot plant as well as its specific yellow ochre color (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, 2024). In exploring this specific facet of Myaamia epistemology as settler educators (in the case of Meeken and Danker) and settler preservice educators, it is imperative to be aware of settler biases that non-Western color systems are less sophisticated, rather than simply different.

In addition to centering Myaamia epistemologies of color, this work also centers contemporary Indigenous use of digital creative tools. This choice is an extension of our collaboration's focus on teaching about Myaamia people as contemporary people (Meeken et al., 2025) and entails a focus on Indigenous *futurity*, which centers the present and future existence of Indigenous people, rather than relegating them to the past. Centering Indigenous futurity pushes back on false conceptions of Myaamia as a people of the past. Indigenous use of digital technologies involves Indigenous futurity in myriad ways - from scholars developing new digital archival protocols that center Indigenous peoples' sovereignty over their own data (Carroll et al., 2021), to individual artists creating virtual worlds that imagine Indigenous futures (e.g. Initiative for Indigenous Futures, 2016; Lightning, 2023; Taipua, 2020), to the Myaamia Center developing a digital dictionary system used to support language revitalization in their own and other communities (Strass, 2021). Tuck et al. (2014) have called for an education that does not prioritize or assume settler futurity when imagining or planning for possible futures. They clarified that "this is not to say there is no future/ity for now-settlers, but that their relationships to Indigenous

land and peoples must be informed by an unsettled imaginary" (p. 17). Indigenized curriculum demands a recognition that colonization is not an event relegated to the past, but is a still-perpetuated structure (Wolfe, 2006) that may be contested and resisted to yield futures where Indigenous life, culture, and sovereignty is assured, and settler presence is not taken for granted. One simple way that the lesson developed by the preservice educators prioritizes the present and future of Indigenous people is that it is an integrated lesson that uses Indigenous aesthetics to meet art and *technology standards* rather than art and history standards (which had been centered in earlier forms of this collaboration (Meeken et al., 2025)). Furthermore, by emphasizing that Indigenous artists use contemporary digital materials, and, implicitly, will continue to develop and adopt new creative technologies, this lesson aims to communicate a future-imaginary where Indigenous artists exist and thrive.

## Emergent Themes in Preservice Educator Reflections

Reflective practice plays an important role in this work for all involved participants, and reflective writing prompts were intentionally developed over the course of the Fall 2024 semester for use within *Art Across the Curriculum*. Danker had been drawn to the currere reflective writing method (Pinar, 1975; 2004) in 2020 to collaboratively investigate issues that arise when teaching art integration focused on social justice (Danker & Bradshaw, 2022; Hood & Travis, 2023; Lee, 2005; Travis, 2020). This framework from curriculum theory elicits critical reflection from one's past, present and future associated with educational experiences. Having used currere method to unpack distinct moments of personal and professional unlearning within the beginning of her curricular collaboration with the Myaamia Center, the power of this writing method was clear to Danker. The specific currere prompts preservice educators responded to were:

- **Regressive (educational past):** What are your past educational experiences (pre-college) learning about Native American cultures?
- **Progressive (imagined future):** What do you hope that the [host school] students take away from these lessons, your lesson this fall and collectively by having the lessons in 4th, 5th and 6th grade? How do you imagine the process of this partnership with the Myaamia Center affecting your educator identity in the future?
- **Analytical (making connections between one's educational past, present and future):** With just over a week before we teach our first Myaamia lesson, how are you connecting your past experiences learning about Myaamia culture to your goals / out-

comes of the lessons (see your reflection from Oct. 3) to where you are right now and what you are thinking and feeling? What is difficult about this work? What are you learning or insights you are gaining about lesson development, collaboration, and partnership work?

- **Synthetic (re-entering the lived present):** Reflect on how teaching the Myaamia lessons this fall have impacted you personally and how it will impact you as a future educator. How might this experiential learning affect your sensitivities or values as an art educator? What are realistic issues that educators may face when implementing curriculum like this? End reflection with any benefits you see from this partnership, particularly related to experiencing the lessons over two years, in both rural and urban settings.

The preservice educators wrote their reflections in a research journal. They were given the first 10-15 minutes of each class to respond to the scaffolded prompts. The particular currere prompts were given on dates that coordinated with experiential learning associated with the Myaamia lessons. In this section, we discuss themes that arose in their writing and artwork relative to their personal and professional growth.

**Appropriation vs Appreciation**

Since the beginning of the curricular collaboration between the Myaamia Center and Danker in 2017, our shared vision has focused on assisting the preservice educators to articulate the difference between cultural appropriation and appreciation (Meeken et al., 2025). The preservice educators learn about specific examples from Myaamia culture through engaging with Myaamia people. Preservice educators also engage with art education scholarship elaborating the distinction between cultural appreciation and appropriation (e.g. Acuff & Kraehe, 2020; Department of Arts Administration, Education, and Policy, 2020; Han, 2019). Then they collaborate on ways to relay these concepts to sixth-graders through culturally-specific imagery.

One preservice educator, "Olivia," commented on practicing cultural appreciation through their own interactions with Myaamia mentors in class. The Myaamia language handout (Figure 1), created in 2023 for the Myaamia community, was a new resource for the Fall 2024 cohort. Once the sixth-grade group decided to teach about color gradients and digital art inspired by Sekulich's work, they hoped to use the handout in their lesson. Indigenous communities vary in their openness for sharing cultural resources with people outside of the community. Etiquette taught through this partnership requires preservice educators to recognize why it is essential to ask for permission to use cultural im-

ages or resources, and similarly to request approval for slides they create to share about Myaamia culture in local classrooms. The preservice educators gained approvals from the Myaamia Center after discussing how the resource would be used in the classroom context; it became another way to discuss an example of how to avoid appropriating from a culture.

Another preservice educator, "Liam," commented on distinguishing between appropriation and appreciation: "While we introduced Myaamia-specific color meanings, derived from our collaborators, we encouraged students to find their own unique interpretations. This approach allowed us to avoid appropriating Myaamia color symbolism and integrate socioemotional learning." Liam's teaching team was careful to introduce Myaamia color meanings, without inviting youth to directly use those meanings in their own color choices. Rather, youth drew upon color associations from their home language(s) and German, the language taught in the host school. The complexity in this preservice educator's reflection likely comes from working with the content over time and through scaffolded applications in classroom settings. They identified learning objectives and connected standards with deeper goals of the work. Adapting this Indigenous-authored resource for their own teaching also required the preservice educators to engage with other Myaamia primary sources to ensure sensitivity and accuracy, which we discuss in the following section.

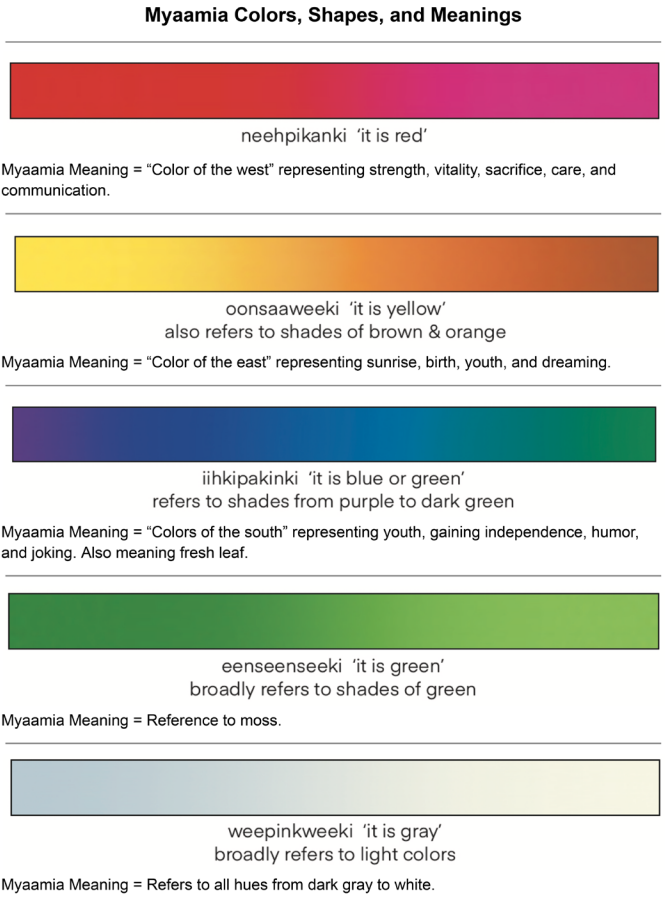
**Cross-referencing and Synthesizing Primary-Source Indigenous Knowledges**

In introducing Myaamia color concepts to the sixth-graders, the preservice educators wanted to include both color epistemology (how colors are understood and organized) and color semiotics (meanings associated with colors) to de-center youths' familiar understandings of color. A challenge they faced was that, among the Myaamia teaching resources shared with the preservice educators, there was no resource that included both epistemology and semiotics of color. The preservice educators needed to develop a new resource to share with the sixth-graders, but also needed to be careful to accurately represent this information.

With guidance from Myaamia artist Sekulich and Myaamia educator Fox, the preservice educators developed a revision of the above-described handout, seen in Figure 2. This new handout synthesized the color-term information from Fox and Sekulich's resource with information from the work of Myaamia scholar and psychologist Dr. Haley Shea (2024). Shea's recent work synthesizing historic and contemporary Myaamia cultural expression to articulate a system of Myaamia

Cultural Values invokes traditional Myaamia associations with the four "directional colors" (para. 5) of black, yellow, red, and blue-green. The preservice educators drew upon this work to include Myaamia color meanings. They also consulted directly with Myaamia collaborators, including George Ironstrack, whose scholarship was foundational to Shea's Cultural Values work (Shea, 2024), and Sekulich, who spoke to her own experience making individual color choices in her work as an artist and designer. Furthermore, students consulted with Hunter Lockwood, settler linguist affiliated with the Myaamia Center, on ecological ties to color words.

**Figure 2.**
*A revision of the handout from Figure 1, developed by preservice educators to convey both Myaamia color epistemology and semiotics.*



The revised handout, in our analysis, reflects a desire to resist universalizing Eurocentric color associations critiqued by Gude (2000). It doesn't present Myaamia words as simply translations of English words, but draws from Fox and Sekulich's prior handout to map Myaamia terms onto the gradient of hues they are connected to. English translations drawn from the ILDA dictionary reflect Myaamia language particularities by translating the Myaamia color words into English verbal phrases rather than basic English color terms. The resource likewise centers Myaamia-specific color associations derived from Shea's (2024) work and from in-person conversations with Fox and Ironstrack. Further, in the reflective writing of multiple preservice educators, they noted that their juxtaposition of Fox and Sekulich's use of gradients in the handout, alongside a lesson that used gradient tools in digital image-making software, was a deliberate choice to connect Myaamia aesthetics with contemporary practices. One preservice educator wrote that the lesson was designed so that "students [would] be able to connect contemporary ideas and subjects like artmaking with technology and the Myaamia people."

However, the handout also reflects some potential limitations in the preservice educators' articulation of Myaamia aesthetics to the youth. Particularly, the choice to adapt the color semiotics delineated by Shea (2024), Fox, and Ironstrack into simple equations with the formulation "Myaamia meaning = [X]" reflects an essentializing approach common in uncritical multicultural art education approaches (Acuff, 2014). In such approaches, universalizing statements (e.g. yellow=happiness and energy) are replaced with more diverse, but still generalized and essentializing terms (e.g. yellow=respect and royalty *in Chinese culture*) (Allison, 2017), that flatten out nuance and ignore individual complexities of color usage. The preservice educators' writings about color reflect both an understanding of the intra-cultural complexities of color meaning from direct work with Myaamia mentors, *and* a tendency to essentialize color meanings. For example, one preservice educator described how Sekulich's artwork deploys color to express complex personal questions around experience and identity, but later described choosing yellow and brown in their own reflective artwork because "in Myaamia culture these colors can represent dreaming," which is a less nuanced characterization. As this was the preservice educators' first time working with these unfamiliar ideas, it is understandable that we see room for iteration and revision. Most preservice educators' writings noted the explicit benefits to youth of combatting white-centered curriculum through anti-racist teaching, indicating that the difficulties did not derive from a lack of will to develop transformative curriculum. In future years, it may be helpful to present preservice educators with examples of universalizing Eurocentric color-meaning lessons

and multicultural, essentializing ones, and challenge them to further revise curricular materials to avoid the pitfalls of both.

**Contemporaneity + Digital Technologies**

Drawing upon Sekulich's work, and the color learning resource co-authored by Sekulich and Fox, the preservice educators developed a lesson where students used Adobe Express, which the sixth-graders we familiar with, to create artwork that used color gradients, shapes, and multiple languages to communicate student understanding. As another preservice educator, "Sam," observed, "The students were so interested in the language that many ended up looking up additional words, such as flower and sunset, in the Indigenous Language Digital Archive dictionary (ILDA Dictionary)." We find it notable that, because students were creating digital art on computers in response to contemporary Myaamia artwork, they had immediate access to the ILDA dictionary. Using contemporary digital art processes facilitated sixth-graders' access to another contemporary digital Indigenous project used for cultural revitalization and creativity[5].

When drawing upon the ILDA dictionary in the digital artmaking, sixth-graders largely focused on ecological words, such as *peehkateeki* 'flower,' *anseensa* 'moss,' *kihcikami* 'big lake,' or *alaankwa* 'star,' and many youth included imagery of trees and the Sun. When revisiting the preservice educators' curricula and reflective writing, we noticed that they largely emphasized abstract concepts associated with colors such as dreaming, vitality, humor, and care, citing a desire to integrate state socio-emotional learning standards. Likewise, in their instruction and reflection ecological connections were de-emphasized. Given the importance of ecology and place in Myaamia knowledge-formation and culture (Ironstrack, 2010), in future iterations of this collaboration, we plan to emphasize more clearly how these terms are rooted in local ecologies. This will also better scaffold from the fifth-grade curriculum, which links ecology and weaving.

## Implications for Ourselves and for Readers

Across the writings of all preservice educators participating in this work, a consistent theme was highlighting mistakes their own teachers had made. Tracy's opening vignette highlighted a relegation of Indigenous peoples to history curricula. Preservice educators also described stereotyped and appropriative crafts, sanitized Thanksgiving narra-

5 It should be noted that the ILDA Dictionary is not used solely to catalog Myaamia language as it is recorded in historic documents, but also to record contemporary creative use of language, including the coinage of novel terms like kiinteelintaakani 'computer' (Boissoneault, 2020).

tives, and, in one case, consternation over the changing of a school mascot that was an Indigenous caricature. One preservice educator, "Eleanor," contrasted her public K-12 experience with her current mentoring and teaching experience, writing that "[l]earning about Myaamia culture from Myaamia people was eye-opening because of how different it was from any other education on Indigenous groups of people I have received in the past." By engaging meaningfully with Myaamia community members, as well as with local communities of elementary learners, in this public pedagogy experience, all participants identified ways they were breaking a cycle of colonizing curricular distortion. We situate this work within the larger mission of the Myaamia Center to strengthen the standing of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma (Myaamia Center, 2018). Specifically, this work engages with the part of the Center's mission focusing on raising awareness of the Myaamia as contemporary people through community education.

In addition to participants' self-identified pedagogical transformations within this particular curricular engagement, we have been able to observe how this experience has impacted the public pedagogy of several preservice art educators in subsequent semesters. In developing engagements for our program's community-facing Saturday Art program, several students have incorporated contemporary, named[6], Indigenous artists in their lessons and designed activities that mindfully avoid appropriation while challenging youth to distinguish between appropriation and appreciation. "Liam," in his written reflections, identified issues of appropriation and miseducation at a summer camp he had been working at for several years. He has since applied for and received undergraduate research funding at our university for a now-unfolding project to reform the curriculum of the camp's programming, rewriting the curriculum to remove appropriative and stereotyped content. His work draws on his experience collaborating with Myaamia teachers, his research into walking pedagogies (Bertling, 2023; Friedman et al., 2025; Springgay & Truman, 2018; Walking Lab, 2021), and includes aspirational aims to foster a reciprocal relationship with members of the community the camp has taken its name from.

We encourage teachers to seek out reciprocal partnerships with Indigenous educators connected to the land where they teach, without centering their own needs or demanding uncompensated labor, and always being willing to accept 'no' as an answer (Meeken et al., 2025). However, we also understand that such direct mentorship is not always possible. Several practices explored in this learning experience would be relevant for any educators, especially settler educators, seeking to teach about Indigenous artists and issues.

6 By "named" we mean here that the preservice educators identify and name specific contemporary artists, rather than use anonymous and generic categories like "Navajo weaving."

Foremost, we stress the importance of teaching about Indigenous peoples as contemporary peoples, and Indigenous artists as contemporary artists. Rather than teaching Indigenous art as a series of depersonalized historic artifacts, center Indigenous artists in discussions of contemporary artists, and in lessons exploring contemporary materials such as digital materials. Author Meeken has developed an online curricular resource for use by K-12 and higher education instructors to facilitate the teaching of Indigenous artists who use digital materials in their work (https://gildedgreen.com/indigital/). In navigating such discussions, it is important to be aware that contemporary Indigenous creatives articulate their work and their identities in diverse ways, often with complex relationships toward their communities' traditional material cultures and toward the English-language terms 'art' and 'artist.' Related to our work, for example, contemporary Myaamia visual and material cultural production plays a vital role in the cultural revitalization work resisting erasure and supporting Myaamia futurity. Such cultural production includes research and reconstruction of historic Myaamia material practices such as ribbonwork (Richard and Carole Cox Art Museum, 2020), weaving (Nally, 2023), and hide painting (Miami University, 2024). It also includes contemporary practitioners who innovate within and upon traditional artforms like ribbonwork and weaving (e.g. Hanson, 2025; Lippert, 2025), as well as contemporary artists and designers who work with nontraditional materials to produce work in conversation with both historic and contemporary concerns (e.g. Beerman, 2022; Ganondagan, 2025; Sekulich, 2024). Some participants in this work embrace the label "artist" (Strass, 2021), while others do not claim that label (Sutterfield, 2022). When teaching about Myaamia cultural revitalization, we also stress to the (majority settler) preservice teachers that, while we are celebrating and raising awareness of art's role in Myaamia cultural revitalization, non-Myaamia teachers and learners *are not themselves revitalizing Myaamia culture.* Non-Indigenous art educators may support and celebrate this work, but are not saviors of Indigenous cultures or peoples.

We also emphasize the importance of avoiding both Eurocentric universalist framings and multicultural essentialist framings of color (and semiotic systems in general). Instructors can highlight the distinctive color epistemologies of different cultural contexts while also emphasizing that meanings are often contested, personal, and ever-changing within those contexts. Centering specific, living artists can assist in this curricular work, as artists' narratives and creative statements can highlight how their individual creative practice interfaces with or pushes back against broader cultural norms.

While these recommended practices emerged from this work, they were not necessarily fully realized by it. We are fortunate to be able

to iterate our pedagogy yearly within this ongoing collaboration, and look forward to the shapes this curriculum will take in future years with future groups. Perhaps this speaks to a final essential recommended practice for this kind of work: maintaining a sense of *cultural humility* (Clark & Sharma, 2021), a comportment which entails a recognition of the limits of our knowledge as settler and Indigenous educators, a willingness to seek out and defer to mentors, and a recognition that there will always be a need for reflection, critique, and learning.

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