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Challenging the Positionality of Western Mainstream English Through the Implementation of Communication Action Statements

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Keywords: land acknowledgments; communication action statement; communication norms; communication diversity; antiracist practices; Western Mainstream English (WME)

Abstract: Communication is the most powerful tool we have to challenge the plague of invisibility impacting our Indigenous communities. As we continue to challenge the diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives touted by our institutions, we need to move beyond mission statements to *motion* (i.e., action required for meaningful transformation to take place) (Qassataq, Iñupiaq, 2022). To call attention to and name the silencing of language and knowledge systems outside of Western Mainstream English (WME), the present paper proposes the concept of Communication Action Statements (CAS). Based on place and space, CASs recognize, label, and affirm the negative effects of WME, as well as call attention to the silencing associated with the reinforcement of WME as the ideal form of communication. Moreover, CASs seek to normalize other knowledge systems outside of the rigid Western model that defines higher education. In conjunction with CASs, to initiate *motion,* we provide four strategies to take action to move beyond acknowledgment and challenge the Communication discipline to continue working to decenter whiteness.

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Introduction

As argued by Rudick (2022) we must name white supremacy to address and change it. Settler colonialism continues to plague higher education today, implicitly and explicitly embedded in the norms and values expected in written, verbal, and nonverbal communication, upholding white supremacy (Chakravartty et al., 2018; Squire et al., 2018). Used as spaces of colonization and assimilation, Indigenous communities have faced centuries of cultural erasure from Western education, and a tenuous relationship remains (Jacobs, 2006; Masta, 2022).

However, for many, post-secondary degrees provide increased economic opportunities and an estimated 65% of jobs require some form of postsecondary credential as of 2020 (Geiman, 2021). Histories of oppression and violence, as well as current exclusion related to Indigenous knowledge, culture, and practices, may make Indigenous students hesitant to enroll in post-secondary education, furthering racial and economic disparities and presenting barriers to their long-term success as they navigate spaces not designed to support their overall development (Postsecondary National Policy Institute [PNPI], 2019). To better support our Indigenous students and peers, we must acknowledge how current perpetuations of WME further colonization and erasure and may contribute to increased barriers to success in higher education, as "culture, identity, and traditional ways of knowing and being are fundamental to and beneficial for Indigenous students' thriving in higher education" (Alejandro et al., 2020, p. 679). Moreover, grounding Indigenous knowledge as an equal partner to Western knowledge is empowering and beneficial to all communities (Terrill, 2022), especially as we experience a resurgence in the explicit communication and perpetuation of white supremacy and settler colonialist ideals through the recent passing of state legislation such as the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) ban in Florida (Diaz, 2023) with many additional Republican controlled states seeking to pass similar laws (Quilantan, 2023). Further, in the coming months, the United States (U.S.) Supreme Court is set to release its decision on keeping or overturning the Indian Child Welfare Act (Chimenti, 2023; Fonseca & Sherman, 2022). This vital federal legislation was enacted in 1978 to stop the removal of Native and Indigenous children from their families and end forced assimilation via boarding schools that has resulted in generations of trauma and cultural epistemicide. Thus, it is more important than ever that we seek to empower Native and Indigenous students and scholars to mitigate current and future legislations' planned erasure of Indigenous cultural and ethnic knowledge.

As such, this paper seeks to continue discussions of disruption related to the continued erasure of communicative diversity (Anzaldúa, 1987; Inoue, 2019; Ladva, 2020; May & McDermott, 2021; Tuck & Yang, 2012), specifically among Native and Indigenous Learners within the context of higher education and within the Communication discipline specifically. The authors propose a CAS loosely inspired by Land Acknowledgments (LA) to name and acknowledge the role of white supremacy in communication norms and expectations taught in many classrooms across the United States. From the implementation of CAS, we further challenge Communication scholars and educators to engage in *motion* (Qassataq, Iñupiaq, 2022). *Motion*, described by Iñupiaq activist Ayyu Qassataq (2022) in a workshop facilitated by the First Alaskans Institute entitled *Alaska Native Dialogues on Racial Equity Project,* encapsulates the action orientation of creating meaningful and sustained change. A powerful, single word call to action, *motion* requires us to adopt and implement tangible change via policies and strategies to continue to

decolonize our communication practices and shift from deficit models to equity-based models that normalize Indigenous knowledge systems and different ways of knowing in Communication classrooms and scholarship.

First, we begin with an overview of the ongoing violence inflicted on Indigenous Learners and by extension their lands, peoples, and sovereignty as Nations. Second, we consider the positionality of WME as the "superior" and oppressive form of communication and language norms. Third, we overview research on the effects of codeswitching in higher education. Fourth, we explore the intersection of communication and *motion*. From this intersection, we argue for the adoption of a CAS. We argue CASs are a tool for communication scholars and the broader academic and professional communities to not only acknowledge but take action to redress the disparities associated with the positionality of WME in much of our language spaces. Lastly, we close with a recommendation for developing and tailoring your own CAS based on place and space, and consider how the CAS may inform strategies and policies related to catalyzing *motion* for Indigenization of the communication discipline.

Authors' Positionality

To begin, we find it essential to define our positionality in relation to this topic. We acknowledge our white[1] privilege as cisgender white women in academia and that we hold the position/identity of being settlers. We seek to use our (white) privilege(s) to advocate and empower Indigenous Peoples' epistemic inclusion to disrupt the continued epistemicide of knowledge systems that fall outside of colonized higher education expectations and to call attention to the injustice of linguistic silencing (Hall & Tandon, 2017). As educators in a predominately white institution with a large Indigenous student population, the University of Alaska Fairbanks, we live in the tension of being settlers and trying to best support our students through decolonizing pedagogies (Azmat & Masta, 2021) as we have seen the negative effects of settler colonialism through the higher education systems and expectations on Indigenous students and peers (Tuck & Yang, 2012). For example, we have seen the negative effects of the perpetuation of WME in higher education classrooms, especially within oral intensive classrooms, that can result in language and identity erasure. Further, because WME norms may be in direct contradiction to Indigenous students' cultural communication practices and values,[2] we have seen high withdrawal rates and increased communication apprehension and anxiety for Indigenous students in oral intensive classes[3] (PNPI, 2019).

As Indigenous scholars and activists, such as Iñupiaq elder Willie Hensley (n.d.), continue the "epic" fight against settler colonialism to protect their language and cultures, we find it imperative to consider "what are my responsibilities as a settler in academia" (Azmat & Masta, 2021, p. 14) and take action. We believe one responsibility is to challenge communication behaviors that devalue, degrade, and demean Native and Indigenous communities. This is the perspective with which this piece is positioned, continued disruption of white supremacy and settler colonialism in communication through naming (Rudick, 2022; Tuck & Yang, 2012), as well as challenging the Communication discipline to catalyze change.

1. In line with guidance put forth by the Associated Press, the authors specifically chose to use a lowercase "w" when referring to white as "capitalizing the term white, as is done by white supremacists, risks subtly conveying legitimacy to such beliefs" (Bauder, 2020, para. 5).
2. The authors are intentionally vague here as Native and Indigenous Learners come from distinct cultures, each with uniquely defined communication norms and values.
3. We acknowledge that many students may have increased communication apprehension and anxiety, such as students who speak English as a second language, neurodivergent students, and other students of color. For the purpose of this paper, we focus specifically on Indigenous students' experiences.

Literature Review

In this review of literature, we first explore settler colonialism in higher education. Second, we situate WME and deficit theory in higher education and its effects on Indigenous Learners. Third, we contextualize current research on codeswitching and its potentially negative effects on linguistic diversity in higher education. Fourth, we consider the intersection of communication and *motion.*[4]

Settler Colonialism in Higher Education

Within the context of higher education and society at large, invisibility is "the modern form of racism used against Native Americans" (the American Indian College Fund, 2019, p. 5; see Grande & McCarty, 2018; Lechuga, 2014; Smith, 1999; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Termed settler colonialism, settlers have often sought to make Indigenous lands their new home through the erasure of Indigenous People and their culture. Settler colonialism continues to reverberate in Indigenous communities today, as the violence of colonialism is "not contained to the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 5). Settler colonialism operates through the seizing of lands and resources (external colonialism) and the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people through institutions, such as schooling and policing (internal colonialism), to uphold white supremacy. As such, settler colonialism results in a "total appropriation of Indigenous life and land" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 5). Within the U.S., settler colonialism has and continues to impact the lives of Indigenous People as many Indigenous groups have been forcibly removed from their lands, their children have been placed involuntarily in boarding schools (internal colonialism), and their lands have been desecrated for the exploitation of natural resources (external colonialism).

While the structure and norms of settler colonialism continue to operate throughout many institutions today (e.g., prison, policing, marginalization), this manuscript is focused on settler colonialism in higher education (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Pihama and Lee-Morgan (2019) explain that "education was both a target and tool of colonialism, destroying and diminishing the validity and legitimacy of Indigenous education, while simultaneously replacing it with an 'education' complicit with the colonial endeavor" (p. 2; for a full review of Indigenous experiences in education see Masta, 2022, and Jacobs, 2006). Ultimately, education continues to be used as a tool of assimilation and erasure (Daniels-Mayes et al., 2021). For example, as argued by Alejandro et al. (2020), earning a postsecondary degree may represent educational and economic opportunities, however, "[it] also induce[s] threats of marginalization, racism, and US ethnocentrism, which affect [Indigenous students] sense of belonging and cultural identity development" (p. 679). Masta (2018) explored how Native American graduate students made sense of their experiences in higher education. The findings of this research demonstrated that participants' perceived tension related to the complexities of their identity and sense of belongingness in academia. Participants reported challenging encounters in and out of the classroom, such as having to defend their Native identity and experiencing ongoing colonization that resulted in feelings of exhaustion (Masta, 2018). Overall, research documents the many negative experiences Indigenous students may face in education today result from microaggressions (Clark et al., 2014; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012; Sonn et al., 2000), ranging from exclusive curricula from colonial perspectives (Alejandro et al., 2020; Masta, 2022) to limited mentorship and representations among faculty (Andersen et al., 2008; Chelberg & Bosman, 2020). Further, recent legislation banning the funding of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives (DEI)

4. Motion, as described by Iñupiaq activist Ayyu Qassataq (2022), is a powerful one-word call to action and accountability that signals a commitment to creating meaningful and sustained change (e.g., through policies, funding, accountability).

in public universities, as well as outlawing the ability for students and educators to talk about the effects of discrimination and exclusion (Diaz, 2023) perpetuate white supremacist ideologies and perspectives, silencing those outside of the dominant group.

In the context of Western education, research from scholars and activist organizations across the globe report low enrollment of Native and Indigenous Peoples in post-secondary educational programs and overall degree conferment (PNPI, 2019). In Australia, for example, Aboriginal students make up less than 2% of all university enrollments (Analysis and Policy Observatory, 2012). In Canada, First Nations students are more likely to attend college, but still lag behind their peers in terms of degree completion, 65% compared to 53% respectively (Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario, 2021). Compared to the larger U.S. population and other learners of color, Native and Indigenous students account for only 1% of undergraduate student population (PNPI, 2019). Oftentimes, these students do not register as a blip for many colleges and universities (Chelberg & Bosman, 2020) due to low enrollment numbers, being reduced to the "other" category in demographic data reporting. The lack of data on Native and Indigenous People has resulted in the "asterisk nation" moniker "because an asterisk, instead of data points, is often used in data displays when reporting racial and ethnic data" (National Congress of American Indians, 2022, para. 5; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This continuation of erasure remains a significant barrier for achievement (e.g., allocation of resources, acknowledgment of identity) among Indigenous students in higher education.

Although white, non-Indigenous scholars may perceive the classroom as transformative, empowering, the path to future success and greatness, for many Indigenous students and scholars higher education can be a "dangerous" place (Qassataq, Iñupiaq, 2022; see Yang, 2017). No matter how much we read, study, and learn from our Indigenous communities, as white settlers, we will never truly understand the trauma, emotional labor, and layers of grief and sadness exacted upon these learners and faculty peers as they navigate a system that has and continues to take so much from them (Jacobs, 2006; Qassataq, Iñupiaq, 2022). However, allowing settler colonialism in higher education policies and practices to remain invisible and unnamed helps to rationalize and maintain a white supremacy status quo (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Situating Western Mainstream English and Deficit Theory

As noted above, the legacy of settler colonialism continues in higher education through a variety of modes (e.g., late policies, penalization, expected language norms). Related to the Communication discipline, communication norms and expectations within higher education create and recreate cultural norms of the dominant majority (i.e., white supremacy), defining not only what is considered acceptable but what is considered deficient or less than by extension. This is inherently part of the legacy of colonization as "the cultural practices that the conqueror-colonizer found were deemed inferior" (Garcia, 2021, para. 5), including the communication norms that were markedly different from early Western settlers. Within academic and workplace communities, communication norms are defined within the framework of WME, also called Academic English (AE). We define WME/AE from a synthesis of the work of MacSwan (2020) and Rolstad (2014) that WME/AE is a form of English which positions the language of the educated classes as more advanced and cognitively complex than others, situating AE as the only suitable language for educational achievement and the primary way people demonstrate intelligence. However, no language is more cognitively complex than another. Ranking language is a cloak for deficit theories derived from racism. As argued by Valencia (2010), "deficit thinking is a pseudoscience founded

on racial and class bias. It 'blames the victim' for school failure instead of examining how schools are structured to prevent poor students and students of color from learning" (p. i).

Further, as Baker-Bell (2020) argues, WME/AE privileges those of European descent who have adopted a very rigid, rule-based pattern of communication. WME/AE forces Learners of Color to adopt the language of their colonizers while simultaneously devaluing the communication norms of their respective cultures. When communication norms are violated, the end result is often linguistic discrimination. Linguistic discrimination is a form of discrimination driven by a perceived failure to use language in a way that affirms the dominant majority (Squire et al., 2018). As such, communication and language remain one of the least socially acceptable ways to engage in discrimination (McDermott et al., 2022). Since language is culturally defined, linguistic discrimination is a form of racism (MacSwan, 2020).

Baker-Bell further argues, "academic English [is also] the language of school, the language of power" (2020, p. 9). While universities and departments have pushed for creating and maintaining neutral, unbiased language, Nguyễn (2021) argued that the absence of overt racism in speaking tips and expectations does not mean that an institution is "anti-racist" (i.e., viewing different races along with their unique practices as equals in terms of value; Kendi, 2019). We provide resources and create programs to address a deficiency versus acknowledging the system is broken, preserving white supremacy (Masta, 2022). Qassataq, Iñupiaq, (2022) challenges this flawed thinking with a plant metaphor in the narrative tradition. A nurturing gardener with a sick plant analyzes the soil, tests the pH, ensures the integrity of the pot used for planting, measures air quality, assesses the hydration, considers distance from the sun and other plants, and so forth, all to ensure the entire system is operating properly. Instead of blaming the plant for failing to thrive, the entire system and its parts are broken down, assessed, primed for interconnectivity, and re-established to promote well-being.

Codeswitching

Unfortunately, unlike the plant metaphor illustrated above, linguistic and communicative diversity may often be seen as a deficit in traditionally white language spaces resulting in the need for People of Color to engage in codeswitching to succeed. Codeswitching is defined as "the use of two different languages or language varieties within a single conversation or written text" (Benson, 2001, p. 23). Situational codeswitching "occurs when the languages used change according to the situations in which the speakers find themselves: they speak one language in one situation and another in a different one" (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2014, p. 98). For example, in the classroom or workplace, Learners of Color may use WME/AE to fit within Western norms, yet at home they may use African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or blended forms of English mixed with Native words and phrases (Leap, 2012). Research reports that People of Color who switch to WME/AE in the workplace are perceived to be more "professional" than those who do not (McCluney et al., 2021). For many Learners of Color, switching to AE may be used as a coping strategy and tool for success (Hall et al., 2012).

Johnson and colleagues (2021) argue codeswitching is a "neutral practice in itself and one that nearly everyone engages in during social interactions" (p. 2). However, for some groups, "these adaptations do not have the same psychological antecedents and consequences" (Johnson et al., 2021, pp. 2–3). Language is intertwined with identity, culture, race, and experiences (Anzaldúa, 1987; Baker-Bell, 2020; Young, 2009). Therefore, when we require people to engage in codeswitching to satisfy WME/AE standards, we may be telling them that part of their identity is not allowed, accepted, or wanted. Further,

there is a double standard when it comes to engaging AE and codeswitching. As Martínez and Martinez (2019) point out, "white subjects" who use non-normative language are often called "innovative" for their appropriation of AAVE or other dialects/varieties, whereas People of Color are criticized for using "slang" or "inappropriate" language and grammar.

Ultimately, for People of Color, codeswitching may demand them to switch away from their "authentic selves" to fit within the dominant cultural norms and narrative (Johnson et al., 2021). As such, previous research has found that codeswitching can be mentally and emotionally exhausting for those who must engage in it (Hall et al., 2012; Johnson et al., 2021). As argued by Liahnna Stanley (Mvskoke, Poarch Band, personal communication, December 7, 2022), "In many spaces, one can save themselves the exhausting and traumatic labor of being themselves in front of people who are not capable of holding and accepting them." The intense focus on WME/AE disempowers AAVE speakers, as well as speakers of other English Varieties, which may lead to burnout and disillusionment. Over time, chronic decisions about how to linguistically represent oneself to avoid discrimination may lead to the diminished congruence between a person's perceived authentic self and outward presentation, as well as result in added stress and negative health effects (DeJordy, 2008).

Recently, scholars have sought to challenge the perpetuation of WME/AE and need to engage in codeswitching in the discipline of Communication. For example, Ladva (2020) challenged Communication Centers to consider how racism may manifest through the silencing of Black Language (Ladva, 2020). Similarly, May and McDermott (2021) have argued the communication basic course privileges Western communication norms, silencing Indigenous ways of communicating and knowing and perpetuating violence against Native and Indigenous Learners. Our English discipline peers have argued for 50 years that students have a basic human right to their own language and ways of communicating, which challenges a "school's right to interfere" (Conference on College Composition and Communication, 2014, p. 8). While these pieces have furthered important conversations regarding expectations of communication norms and language in public speaking classes and Communication Centers, as a discipline, Communication scholars can be nurturing gardeners (Qassataq, Iñupiaq, 2022) and put into *motion* decolonizing practices that help transform the discipline and ultimately our institutions (Inoue, 2019). As argued by Anzaldúa (1987) "we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates" (p. 304). Thus, we can no longer perpetuate WME/AE as the *superior* form of communication that silences other forms of communication norms and behaviors. Disrupting and dismantling the power associated with WME in silencing other forms of communicating is an important step in the recognition of past wrongs and suffering (Kendi, 2019), as well as for reaffirming peoples' cultural identities and communication behaviors. Acknowledging the role of communication for constructing our reality, through the intersection of communication and *motion*, we can identify places for disruption of settler colonialism in higher education.

The Intersection of Communication and *Motion*

The communication discipline has faced intense scrutiny for its lack of diversity. #Communicationsowhite (Chakravartty et al., 2018) is an example of activism that calls out the lack of diverse representation in faculty appointments, publications, awards and recognition, and leadership. As argued by Liahnna Stanley (Mvskoke, Poarch Band, personal communication, December 7, 2022):

> #Communicationsowhite critiques whiteness as it structures systems and practices of knowledge production (i.e., citations, publication processes, impact factors) that erase and write

marginalized peoples out of the discipline, and then use those same terms to justify their failure (i.e., through terms like “rigor” and “merit”).

Within the context of Indigenous Studies specifically, the National Communication Association (NCA) has lagged. As evidence, the Indigenous Caucus was only sanctioned by NCA Legislative Assembly in 2020 (NCA, 2020) after the Indigenous scholar and activist, LaRoyce Batchelor (Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Creek), navigated the NCA bureaucracy. In the communication classroom, many of us rely on the traditional canon of white cisgender male scholars (e.g., Aristotle’s persuasion, Schramm [1949] communication model, and McLuhan’s [1966] research on media studies). Indigeneity as a pedagogical practice is in its infancy amongst many communication scholars and practitioners. Yet, communication is one of the most powerful tools we have to challenge the plague of invisibility and continued epistemicide impacting our Indigenous communities. Jefferson Keel, Chickasaw, executive board president for the National Congress of American Indians, underscores the importance of communication for Native communities by noting “our future success as tribal nations is directly linked to how effectively we communicate, and advocate for, the issues important to all of our people” (National Congress of American Indians, n.d., p. 2).

As white non-Indigenous scholars, inspired by Ayyu Qassataq, Iñupiaq, (2022) call to action of *motion*, we offer the following idea to disrupt our discipline and challenge others to engage in meaningful and sustained change to further DEI initiatives beyond performative social justice: A Communication Action Statement (CAS) to guide our pedagogical practices that allow Native and Indigenous Learners to “fully step into their gifts” (Qassataq, Iñupiaq, personal communication, December 2, 2022). While inspired by Land Acknowledgments (LA), a CAS moves beyond acknowledgment to *motion*, challenging us to decenter whiteness and Western communication practices to normalize different ways of knowing.

Communication Action Statement

In this section we begin with an overview of Land Acknowledgments (LA). Next we overview Communication Action Statements (CAS). We then consider what CASs look like in *motion*. Finally, we provide guidance for creating your own CAS.

Land Acknowledgments (LA)

While varied in their presentation globally, LAs are typically statements read at the start of an event or printed on handout materials that “tell our Indigenous students and colleagues that we believe their experience and the experience of people like them is important and meaningful to the history of our institution” (Whitemore & Carlson, 2022, para. 1). They typically acknowledge specific tribes whose ancestors lived on and cared for the lands currently occupied by the institution and surrounding communities. These statements are commonplace at many colleges and universities, purportedly to support Native and Indigenous Learners, and continue to spread into mainstream practices especially after Standing Rock protests were covered so heavily by various media outlets (St. James, 2022).

LAs, despite their good intentions, are criticized and debated among activists, Native and Indigenous Peoples, and academics alike. Activist and author Michelle Cyca, for example, invited Twitter users to share the worst LAs they’ve ever seen after calling out Vancouver Island University and Washington State Department of Corrections for their insincerity and lack of depth (Cyca, 2022). Indigenous Peoples and organizations that support their communities have varied and complex responses to the use of

LAs, ranging from "condescending bullshit" to feeling "really nervous" (Isador, 2019). Other activists take offense to how clumsily readers of LAs stumble over Native words and names of tribes. As argued by Robinson et al. (2019) "a lot hinges on the language we use to describe how we occupy the lands we live and work upon" (p. 20). Thus, the communication and language norms used in LAs are important to consider. Robinson et al. (2019) poignantly argues, "I'd like to acknowledge what happens when you stumble over our nations, our names—when Indigenous language falls carelessly out of the mouth, shatters upon the ground—is heard as a certain kind of acknowledgement too" (p. 20). Finally, within the context of higher education, LAs may be perceived as checking a required box in an attempt to appease Native and Indigenous Peoples versus a truly informed, reflective practice (Daigle, 2019). Most importantly, LAs acknowledge but ultimately lack *motion* (i.e., words without corresponding action and sustained improvement). *Motion*, according to Ayyu Qassataq, Iñupiaq, (2022), is required for meaningful transformation to take place. Within the context of our respective institutions, *motion* allows us to go beyond the surface to challenge the existing social, cultural, and institutional practices that ultimately provide the milieu designed to support learners.

The Communication Action Statement (CAS)

Embracing *motion*, CASs seek to explicitly name the perpetuation of white supremacy through WME/AE as an expected communication norm and create the space for linguistic and epistemic freedom. Below we provide an example of a drafted CAS for the authors' home institution among the Dena People of the lower Tanana River:

> We recognize and make space for the communication norms and values of the Dena People of the lower Tanana River and their ancestors who care for these lands. Alaska is home to at least twenty distinct Indigenous languages. More than just dialectal variants, these different languages reflect the diverse cultural heritage of Alaska's Native Peoples. We acknowledge the communication norms we[5] know and practice are based in western knowledge systems that uphold white supremacy. We invite learners to share with us their language, Elder wisdom, and communication practices so that we may grow together as a community.

This statement is important for a few reasons. First, it seeks to recognize and affirm the importance of place and cultural diversity in communication norms. As argued by Masta (2022), Indigenous perspectives and worldviews are often dismissed and diminished in higher education classrooms. Therefore, explicitly acknowledging and affirming the value of cultural diversity in communication norms and expectations may help to decolonize communication spaces. Second, this statement seeks to dismiss the idea of a linguistic hierarchy by placing equal value on communication norms that define Native and Indigenous cultures. We seek to move from theory to practice, we communicate the value of "learn[ing] *from* (not *about*)" our Indigenous students and peers (Sabzalian, 2019, p. 330). Moreover, similar to the importance of communicating pronouns to affirm gender identity, a CAS can create the space for open discussion related to identity, as well as signal mutual respect, and cultivate a more welcoming and tolerant environment (National Institute of Health, 2022). Third, this statement seeks to challenge the idealization and reverence of WME in academic and professional spaces. It specifically names and calls out WME in upholding white supremacy (Rudick, 2022) and seeks to bring attention to the notion that current conceptualizations of linguistic norms and knowledge are based on ranking grounded in colonization and deficit theory (MacSwan, 2020). Finally, CASs seek to get people

5. "We" should be further defined in practice to specify the faculty member, department, and larger community.

thinking about challenging steadfast systems they may have come to expect and accept, such as when and where linguistic and epistemic freedom is "allowed." Because of the cultural significance of place and space, culture, and identity, related to Indigenous ways of being, we need to critically assess how settler colonialism may manifest in higher education to move toward belonging for Indigenous students (Alejandro et al., 2020).

What Does a CAS Look Like in *Motion*?

As defined above, *motion* requires tangible, meaningful, and sustained action. Thus, CASs require additional work outside of the statement itself. Specifically, the *motion* of the statement must manifest in tangible strategies and policies for disrupting settler colonialism in higher education. We provide some of the strategies we use in the classroom as we grow with our Native and Indigenous communities and invite other Communication scholars and practitioners to continue to develop and refine the implementation of *motion*-based actions:

1. Expand the definition of credible sources. Oftentimes, we limit credible sources to academic and peer-reviewed articles pulled from the campus library. For Native and Indigenous Learners, Elders are *the* credible sources for disseminating knowledge, and they have been for thousands of years, long before the educational systems of the west were established (thousands of years compared to roughly 500, respectively) (Hall & Tandon, 2017). To exclude them as credible challenges foundational cultural norms and values while simultaneously dehumanizing members of their community. Moreover, it is a form of epistemicide (Hall & Tandon, 2017).
2. Provide learners with language options. At a recent intensive (i.e., a condensed) course in Alaska, one of the authors was asked by Yup'ik members of her learning community to allow them to present in Yugtun, their native language. We agreed on slides in English; however, they were allowed to present their entire speeches in Yugtun. The entire learning community came alive and learners engaged with the course content in profound and new ways. While the author did not understand the language, she fully understood the meaning of what was happening between learners. And for the professor, it was a reversal, requiring extensive labor to sit in the discomfort of being the only one who did not understand the language, cultural references, and jokes that resulted in a room full of laughter.
3. We challenge our peers to consider how other ways of knowing are introduced into the curriculum. Qassataq, Iñupiaq, (2002) argues that as educators we play a critical role in defining what is perceived as important, and by extension, what is not important, as we introduce/omit content, scholars, and community members into our learning communities. The Alcatraz Proclamation (Indians of All Tribes, 1969), for example, is a powerful example of persuasion and opens up an important part of the Civil Rights movement, that of the American Indian Movement, which is often lost or neglected in U.S. primary and secondary institutions. Educators are challenged to partner with community agencies and cultural resource centers that represent Native and Indigenous communities and tap into campus resources. The authors, for example, are privileged to have access to an Elder network known as Visiting Elder Professor. This program matches Elders with educators. The Elders visit classrooms and share their knowledge, language, and experiences with the campus community, leading the learning community in partnership with the instructor of record.

4. Create an inclusive rubric for evaluating speeches in partnership with your students, faculty peers, and basic course director. The current rubric used in many communication classrooms is derived from the National Communication Association's Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form (NCA, 2007). This competency-based model privileges Western communication norms (e.g., setting an ideal speech pattern, grammatical structure, organizational pattern, and delivery specifics). In reality, this form assesses a student's ability to assimilate versus communicate in a way that speaks to their cultural norms and values. While we acknowledge that WME norms are an important skill for people to be able to codeswitch into to participate in today's job market, how WME norms are presented via the rubric and course content needs to be carefully considered. For example, in current public speaking courses, 15 weeks of course content is often focused on refining the speaking skills related to WME expectations. Basic course directors and instructors are challenged to consider how additional public speaking norms could be introduced and integrated into the curriculum. For example, how can alternative speaking assignments outside of the traditional informative and persuasive speeches be used to teach students about public speaking globally?

Create Your Own CAS

While we provide a basic CAS as an exemplar, consider drafting your own CAS to reflect the place you are in physically or virtually, as well as identify ways to put it in *motion*. As Robinson et al. (2019) argues related to LAs, "To read and repeat prescriptive acknowledgement without variance runs counter to the foundational values of acknowledgement" (p. 21). Therefore, we recommend that you adapt and tailor your CAS based on place, space, and community.

Amnesty International (2017) has a simple three-step guide to developing LAs, which provides a simple starting point for reflection: (1) Name the Indigenous territories you are currently on; (2) explain why you are acknowledging the land; (3) address the relevance of Indigenous rights to the subject matter of your event or meeting or to your activist work in general. We used these three steps as a framework for creating a guide to developing a CAS: (1) Acknowledge the positionality of WME/AE in your environment and the other languages and knowledge systems it silences; (2) explain why you are acknowledging the silencing of additional languages and knowledge systems; (3) address the relevance of communication, linguistic, and knowledge diversity to the subject matter of your event or meeting or to your activist work in general.

Importantly, putting *motion* behind your CAS is vital. Without *motion*, the CAS may become a piece of performative social justice. Calling out WME/AE and implementing strategies to challenge white supremacy must be done in tandem to work toward building higher education and Communication as a discipline as a decolonializing space.

Limitations

As scholars with white cisgender privilege, we seek to use our privilege(s) to empower and stand with Native and Indigenous Peoples' epistemic inclusion in the communication curriculum discipline-wide. We seek to call out and name the settler colonialism still embedded in Communication that upholds white supremacy and results in erasure of others. While we did solicit feedback from our Indigenous

peers at our respective institution and selected members of the Indigenous Caucus at NCA, we need feedback, discussion, and debate from the larger Indigenous community. We welcome feedback to help uncover flaws in our argument that may be hidden by our privilege. Moreover, we published this piece in hopes of starting a larger conversation within our discipline. CASs need to be reviewed, debated, and challenged by the larger discipline and framed within existing power structures to ensure relevancy and that we are not doing unintended harm with this idea. We encourage scholars who work within other silenced spaces, such as those in the Black Caucus, the Latino/Latina Communication Studies Division, the Asian/Pacific American Caucus, and International Communication scholars, to continue building on or challenge this conversation and to add in information about the silencing of their own languages and knowledge systems. Finally, without action, there will be no change. Adopting a CAS without accountability fails to bring about transformative change. Adopting a model of accountability is a needed area of focus moving forward: "let us be graceful with ourselves, and commit to grace with others. Making sure to hold each other when we inevitably 'mess up.' We cannot let ourselves become neutralized in fear" (L. Stanley, Mvskoke, Poarch Band, personal communication, December 7, 2022).

Conclusion

We must continue to assess and consider how settler colonialism may manifest in higher education and create exclusive learning communities, especially through the communication norms we teach and expect. Because of the cultural significance of place and space, and culture and identity, related to Indigenous ways of being, acknowledging the role of WME in the erasure of Indigenous Peoples, lands, identities, and cultures through settler colonialism is the first step in creating *motion* (i.e., meaningful and sustained change) within the Communication discipline and higher education. Thus, serving as a microaffirmation, CASs can call out the preservation of white supremacy in higher education through linguistic and communicative norms and practices. From the creation of CAS, theoretically, this manuscript considers the role of Communication as a discipline and practice for disrupting settler colonialism in higher education. Further, this manuscript seeks to continue discipline-wide discussions for understanding how communication theory can be critiqued, expanded, and implemented to create more equitable communication spaces, as well as reinforce the need for the development of new theoretical frameworks that encompass decolonialized communication norms and expectations. Practically, we seek to move from theory to practice, to "learn *from* (not *about*)" (Sabzalian, 2019, p. 330) Indigenous students and peers by intentionally making space for communicative diversity and engaging in *motion*. Through the naming of white supremacy in our language and communication spaces, combined with meaningful changes in policy and practice (e.g., public speaking norms we expect, what we deem credible sources) we can signal mutual respect and seek to create spaces of belonging that begin to reframe and reposition Western education as collaborative vs. colonizing, equal vs. hierarchical.

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