

## Indigenizing the Curriculum: The Importance of Story

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“The strength of the people of the First Nations to control the content of the school curriculum is enhanced by their ability and willingness to put into writing the stories of their ancestors.”

(Lafond, 1991, p. vii)

Recently I attended an evening talk by Richard Wagamese, an accomplished Canadian Aboriginal author. He read from some of his books, and talked of his journey as a writer. He provided helpful advice for aspiring authors in the audience. Like Thomas King (2003), he also emphasized the power of story. What we experienced that evening, and the reason why Richard Wagamese’s (e.g., 1994, 2009, 2011, 2012) writing is so compelling, is the connection of story – our stories – to what it means to be human. Richard Wagamese is a great author because he finds ways to connect his stories to our humanity. As we continually search for our own meaning and purpose, these stories allow us to communicate with others who are also searching. In that communication we develop understandings of our shared humanity, and realize that our differences enrich that shared journey. This article tells a more academic story of a research program funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), under their Community University Research Alliance (CURA) initiative. Our program, entitled *Community-Based Aboriginal Curriculum Initiatives*, received funding from 2005 to 2012. There are interrelated stories, but the focus is on the importance of story for indigenizing the curriculum and making a difference in schools for all children and youth as they learn about First Peoples. Addressing how the hegemonic story of Aboriginal peoples has been created in North America is important in providing the initial framework for this story of our research.

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### THE HISTORICAL EMPHASIS ON HEGEMONIC STORY

“History . . . is a contest between genre choices, including which groups are capable of what violence to assert their preferred story”

(Frank, 2010, p. 143).

“Storytelling is a subversive act that causes people to question the society around them. Storytellers hold the core of a counter memory, and offer another political possibility”

(McLeod, 2007, pp. 99-100).

There are no clear beginnings to many stories. In a discussion of Aboriginal education, however, we can refer back to the traditional teachings, and the community and family mentoring that children received prior to European contact. That approach included the use of story as a teaching practice, particularly in helping children and youth find their gifts and using them for the good of the community, as well as telling of human foibles and especially how the temptation for individual aggrandizement can lead to selfish actions that endanger the community (e.g., Auger, 2006). The long history of residential schools, which were created as a means of enforcing cultural changes accompanying European colonization, has left a legacy with its own stories (e.g., Johnston, 1989; Loyie, 2001, 2008). The experiences from residential schools, combined with the enforced relocation of Aboriginal peoples onto reserves, and the accompanying constraints imposed on their movement and participation in Canadian society, have created storied lives that continue to violate the humanity of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, and of the country as a whole.

Over many decades, and still lingering today in the lived reality of many of our First Peoples, only certain stories were validated concerning the importance of the beliefs and values of Aboriginal peoples. Once created and circulated, stories connect with other stories, and become the 'truth' that guides our decisions, the life patterns that liberate or entrap, and that become enshrined in belief structures that drive legislation and law. The push for settlement was strong in a newly established country whose primary focus was agriculture. Part of that story of the agricultural settlement, in response to competition for land with the United States, involved the building of a railroad, for example, which was eulogized for Canada's centennial in 1967 by singer-songwriter Gordon Lightfoot, with a storied song that even recently was chosen to be performed for a major Canadian sports event:

There was a time in this fair land when the railroad did not run,  
When the wild majestic mountains stood alone against the sun.

Long before the white man and long before the wheel

When the green dark forest was too silent to be real. (Lightfoot, 2010)

And while Aboriginal peoples would remind us that the mountains were not alone, and that the forest was not silent, the song remains and is still retold as a part of Canada's storied past. First Peoples, and increasingly conservationists, would tell an overlapping story of the interruption of animals' migratory patterns and traditional geographical life space that

accompanied agricultural settlement, including the building of the railroad. In the 2010 published children's book of the Gordon Lightfoot song, that other story is noted at the end of the book. Thus, other stories are being told and earlier stories are being re-told that layer with the original stories. New understandings are interwoven, for those who might choose to listen.

The practice of hegemony manipulates what stories are told, and how they are told, and who listens:

Hegemony refers to the maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force, *but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system, and the family.* (McLaren, 2009, p. 67, emphasis in original)

Those 'consensual' social practices may initially emanate from enforced situations that have given people no choice over their lives. In what is now Canada, for instance, the initial focus was not on agricultural settlement, which came only later as a method to ensure the success of British imperial expansion. Initially, as well as the clearly hegemonic agenda of the various churches to convert the Aboriginal peoples to Christianity, there was the seemingly more subtle but equally as devastating practice of the fur trade. While there had long been trade among the Aboriginal peoples themselves, it was the European fancy for fur garments, in particular the beaver hat, with accompanying Aboriginal access to European goods that promised an easier life and that made the killing of animals more efficient, that resulted in the widespread hegemonic participation of the Aboriginal peoples in the destruction of their own lifestyles and the abandonment of the traditional belief in embracing nature as integral to their own humanity. The utter denigration of the relationship of Aboriginal peoples with their animal kin was encouraged by a dominant culture that believed in manifest destiny regardless of its somewhat more subdued presentation in Canada compared to the United States. That belief, as part of the playing out of British and French and later American imperial competition, soon led to agricultural settlement, the competition between the fur trade and such settlement (e.g., Red River), and the change in relationships—and stories—with Aboriginal peoples. While necessary in the partnerships that built the fur trade, with both Aboriginal men and women playing integral roles in that trade, the First Peoples' presence became a nuisance with agricultural settlement. The drive for treaty settlements, which included the creation of reserves, usually

on non-arable land but subject to change when ‘mistakes’ were made (e.g., St. Peters reserve, originally located on rich agricultural land near Selkirk, Manitoba, was moved north to low lying muskeg-like land), and the enforced relocation of people to those reserves, became the predominating hegemonic story. As declared in Gordon Lightfoot’s (1967/2010) song, commissioned by the Canadian government:

Oh the song of the future has been sung  
All the battles have been won  
O’er the mountain tops we stand  
All the world at our command  
We have opened up the soil  
With our teardrops and our toil

The settlement of North America by people from other continents vastly changed the landscape with the introduction and spread of invasive agriculture—the ‘opening up of the soil’—and the five big domestic animals, the horse, cow, pig, goat, and sheep. The effects are stunningly presented by National Geographic in their documentary film entitled *America before Columbus*. The purposeful slaughter of the buffalo in central North America expedited the spread of agriculture and the destruction of the way of life and the food source for many Aboriginal people. In just a few short decades the numbers of buffalo were reduced from many millions to several thousand. The effect of that slaughter on the many other animals as well as plants within the ecosystem was devastating for the environment and for the Aboriginal peoples of the plains. Many who traditionally depended on the buffalo now had to hunt into the territory of historical enemies. In many situations, the deep hunger and need for shelter—as the Aboriginal people of the plains depended on the buffalo also for clothing, dwellings, fuel, and tools—was engineered by the dominant culture to force the fiercely independent Aboriginal leaders into submission.

Even at the time, however, there were counter-hegemonic stories of resistance to the violation, for example that of the Lakota Chief Crazy Horse, that were, in turn, countered with stories of the swift retaliation by government with the killing of these leaders, the hanging of those who resisted the violation of Aboriginal people, their land, and their rights (e.g., 1862 Mankato massacre), as well as the slaughter of women, children, and the elderly (e.g., 1890 Wounded Knee massacre). The hegemonic stories created about the Aboriginal people most often did not have to include

either the enforced or 'willing' voices or stories of the Aboriginal people themselves. However, the participation of some leaders in Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, for example, underscored the hegemonic story of manifest destiny, where even some of the strongest Aboriginal leaders became part of the residual glory of the imperial power, which had reduced them to side-show attractions. Métis singer and songwriter, Don Freed (2007), stories this time in his song 'One Year Gone':

One year gone, and the dust that's barely settled  
Rises in the wake of these returning hooves and wheels.  
One Year Gone.  
Riel is dead and buried.  
Gabriel, he's in the circus where the bears dance for their meals!  
We are tamed now  
We are beaten!

(See full lyrics at <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/05250>)

Storied pictures of the Aboriginal peoples, at that earlier time, were believed because only those in power, and those who wanted to settle in North America, were the tellers and the listeners. Hegemonic control was achieved through the sheer destruction of the environment and the way of life of peoples who had neither the numbers, nor the technology, nor the resistance to the introduced diseases, to counter the stunning savagery that was unleashed under the joint hegemonic banners of colonialism and Christianity. The full extent of the change brought about by those two aspects is captured in the oft-repeated maxim by Aboriginal peoples, when referring to the contemporary strength of Christianity in their reserve communities and the growing secularism outside of their communities: "When Europeans came here, they had the Book, and we had the land. Now it's the other way around."

As noted, the counter-hegemonic stories always co-existed within the hegemony, even if those voices were silenced as much as possible. Aboriginal peoples continued, in secret, to speak their own languages and to honour their own ceremonies, even when those ceremonies, like the potlatch, were deemed illegal by the Canadian government. Sometimes, parents left for the bush, taking with them their children who would have been taken to residential schools, and escaping the prisons ready to engulf them for daring to defy the legislated attendance of their children at those schools. Sometimes, and increasingly in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, an Aboriginal author's voice, so brilliant

that their work could simply not be denied, resounded like the thundering hooves of thousands of buffalo. For example, N. Scott Momaday's 1968 Pulitzer prize winning novel *House Made of Dawn* underlined the coming of the 'new buffalo'—education with its power of voice—on the one hand. On the other hand however, such writers were embraced by hegemonic forces as examples of meritocracy, the contention that anyone could rise to success if they were sufficiently motivated. Despite the conflicting translations that continue to emanate from the success stories of the marginalized, those stories of our First Peoples, once released, have the capacity to serve as the vehicle for second-order critique and change of the status-quo. Momaday's work, and that of other authors in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Leslie Marmon Silko, Gerald Vizoner, Louise Erdrich), was controversially described by Kenneth Lincoln (1983), in his book of the same name, as leading the *Native American Renaissance*. Of course, these prominent Aboriginal writers' works were predated by writing from other Aboriginal authors, for example, Charles Eastman and Pauline Johnson. The difference, some may point out, is that the later authors were acutely aware of and elaborated the extent to which indigenous voice had been silenced and/or manipulated in the past, whereas some earlier authors may have colluded more explicitly in hegemonic manipulation.

The concept of meritocracy came under more blatant challenge with the civil rights era of the 1960s. The increased access to the means of making one's voice heard benefited later activists and authors, allowing them to find each other and to build the grassroots strength that could not be denied. They were joined by non-Aboriginal allies, for example Dee Brown, with his stunning 1970 work *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee*. His exposure of the treatment of Aboriginal peoples, including the theft of their lands, the repetitive defying of treaty promises, the slaughter of the animals upon which they depended as well as the environmental degradation that destroyed the food supplies of both the animals and the Aboriginal people, the introduction of deadly diseases, and the massacres of the elderly, the women, and the children brought home to people the truth of the lived reality of Aboriginal peoples. Dee's book underwent several printings, was reissued in an illustrated edition, became available in audio, and was taken up in a song by the same name by Buffy St. Marie (1996) and also a movie of the same name (Giat & Simoneau, 2007). Both the song and the film added powerful voices that communicated the critique of hegemony in ways that strengthened the foundation for that critique for many others.

## THE COMPLEXITY OF STORY

Take our sense of ourselves as equal citizens in a democratic state; to the extent that we not only understand this as a legitimate principle, but actually imagine it as integrally realized, we will be engaging in a cover-up, averting our gaze from various excluded and disempowered groups or imagining that their exclusion is their own doing. (Taylor, 2004, p. 183)

The stories that denigrate Aboriginal peoples have a strong life, particularly when those stories are ingested, adopted as one's own, and begin to flow within the lived experience of Aboriginal peoples, destroying hope and crushing dreams. That is the power of hegemony, that negative patterns spawned from the contrived and enforced stories from outside, can infiltrate one's inside identity, and translate to the lived experiences of many of the people of an entire race that was and continues to be marginalized by the dominant story of hegemonic meritocracy (See Little Bear, 2000, & Yazzie, 2000). When those lived experiences are what are seen on the street, in the media, and in the statistics of school drop-out rates and prison statistics, the negative image is even further engrained within the racism and resultant classism of hegemonic story, and within the self-blame and self-loathing upon which the status quo of the meritocracy depends. The assumption of institutional structures as neutral, and as providing the opportunity for anyone to rise in the system, has been debunked by many writers, and by singers, novelists, and poets alike, but systems and their underlying messages do not easily change in response. There are attempts to communicate change by including First Peoples within organizations, as well as functions that feature traditional Aboriginal culture, but often without making any substantive, second-order change, the 'soup and bannock day' or what one colleague recently called the 'add an Elder and stir' approach (S. Pete, personal communication, October 25, 2012).

It was into this mix of the stories of the past and contemporary struggles created for our First Peoples that several colleagues within the university in the city of Brandon, Manitoba, decided to wade. Our conversations focused on how to indigenize the school curriculum so that our Aboriginal students could see their storied lives validated within the school. The integration of Aboriginal ways of knowing and being in the world might lead to their increased attendance and engagement in school until they reached graduation. That initiative led to a successful application for a federal grant

for a project entitled *Community-Based Aboriginal Curriculum Initiatives: Implementation and Evaluation*. The grant involved a two-stage application process with many proposal and résumé writing meetings. There were many collaborators and partners. We were creating, or at least it seemed at the time, a groundswell of support for a counter-hegemonic story that involved the devoted commitment of many people. Deeper, substantive, second-order change was within our realization. We could make a difference within five years.

Part of the strength of hegemonic story is its chameleonic nature. The surface of the water can be manipulated even when the undercurrent remains unchanged and strong. Indeed, the undercurrent may be prompted to become strengthened by the seeming resistance from the surface, some of which can even be introduced and/or encouraged by the dominant and hegemonic undercurrent itself. That encouragement allows for continued superficial initiatives, but also entices the unwitting, the unwilling, and the naïve, and pulls them under and makes examples of them for anyone else who might consider leaving the safety of the dry dock of that superficial change, and ensures the widespread continued collusion with a status quo that violates the humanity of many while seeming to work toward validating change for all. This hegemonic story is so powerful that it continues to entrap Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike in the clutches of the belief that there is, and can be, only one game in town. That attitude of 'false necessity' (Unger, 1967) chains almost everyone, even those most violated by the system, to the status quo and to its first-order improvement, rather than committing to the second-order change that will validate those currently rejected by that status quo. The threat is very real, as one's actual job may be on the line, or at least be perceived to be.

Thus, there is truth to the 'only one game in town' theory. By definition, and given its link to the root word, counter-hegemonic stories are defined by their difference from the status quo and their opposition to it. All counter-hegemonic stories spark of frailty, of vulnerability.

The framework of our grant's work spoke to the creation of a different story. Rather than simply adding-on to the participating schools' programs, we wanted to integrate the knowledge of Aboriginal peoples to meet curricular outcomes. In Manitoba, as well as in some other Canadian provinces, the curricula are outcomes based. Thus, in Grade one, with a Science outcome involving the senses, any resource can be used to achieve



the various specific outcomes through which the child learns about their senses. Aboriginal peoples' knowledge, traditionally so closely connected with nature and attuned through the senses, could help the children—all children—achieve those outcomes. The program involved the participation of Aboriginal artist-educators, defined broadly, as partners in education, learning about the curriculum documents and how their knowledge might be formally integrated into those documents. The knowledge of First Peoples would be honoured, and would assist all children in achieving not only stated learning outcomes but also a deeper appreciation of our First Peoples themselves and their gifts, knowledge, and contributions.

Almost immediately we ran into problems associated with status quo expectations. Ours was not the first initiative that introduced the concept of participation of Aboriginal people in the school. In fact, many such initiatives had been experienced in Manitoba schools with programs like the provincial Artists in the School, or with the ArtsSmarts program, or supported through AAA (Aboriginal Academic Achievement) funding, or the BSSAP (Building Success with Aboriginal Parents) program. The difference with our program is that we did not have an agenda, or a game plan for the school. The program for each participating school, for the second-order change that we envisioned could happen, had to be created within the school and the community in response to their needs and driven by their commitment. Now that our project time is complete, and I actually say that, I am stunned at my capacity for naivety. I actually expected, and was affirmed during the proposal writing process, that the school system, steeped as it was within its own systemic impediments toward change, would initiate programs that would crack the power of its own status quo, that would strike at its own Achilles heel. While there was support within the grassroots of the schools themselves, our initiative was simply too threatening for most of our partnering organizations to even associate themselves with, let alone participate in. Regardless of having participated in the application process, partners from within the public education system quickly disassociated themselves once the grant was awarded. Some went so far as to openly try to sabotage the program within their partnering organization and/or within the university.

We had extended invitations to all public school divisions and all First Nations in southwestern and south central Manitoba. We had visited many of those school divisions and First Nations to explain the nature of

the grant. We were held up for an entire school year by a school division where five schools wanted to participate, but the senior administration kept asking for changes, only to strategically decide in June when principals and teachers were busy with year-end responsibilities, not to let their schools participate. There was barely a whisper of opposition. We had already used up more than a year of our five-year time allotment, and our story told only of frustration and tears, it seemed. Finally, with the assistance of one of the collaborators, who had to swim against the current of their own employing organization, five First Nations schools agreed to participate. Of the five participating schools, only one had been part of the program right from the beginning, from the proposal writing stage. One of the collaborators from that school then brought her home reserve community into the program, and an Aboriginal teacher living in Brandon and hearing of our program, moved to another community, and she encouraged that school to participate. That teacher then moved again to one of the two remaining participating schools, both of which had been encouraged to join by the collaborator from one of our partnering organizations. The schools that did participate included a process whereby the program was approved by the school administration and at the Chief and Council level. All of the schools experienced changes in staff over the years, with only one of the schools with the same person on the administrative staff, albeit in a different position, that had been involved in the initial approval process.

#### THE STORY OF THE PROGRAM

Dialogical interpretation seeks not to pronounce on the story or the storytelling scene, but rather to engage the story in ongoing dialogue. (Frank, 2010, p. 88)

Over the next few years, with extensions of two and one-half years, our struggles changed in complexion but not in complexity. Each school selected a community-based coordinator. We worked to develop cadres of artist-educators from each community, all with knowledge to contribute, and all who would also serve as excellent role models for the students. The change was difficult to embrace, however, even when the concept was said to be accepted, for a variety of reasons, all of which are important and interrelated.

First, what was evident was that teachers, with a variety of years of experience and sustained pedagogical strategies, were not always following the curriculum documents with reference to a common framework to guide

our work. If those documents were subsumed within textbooks and other resources that had been touted as following curriculum guidelines, then it was more difficult to step out of the constraints of those textbooks and resources. Some did not realize that the suggested resources and textbooks from the provincial government were, in fact, not required. Even when they did, some clung to those known and familiar resources even though there was, most often, little recognition of the Aboriginal experience addressed within those resources. Thus, when addressing the activating, acquiring, and applying strategies of a lesson plan (Manitoba Education & Youth, 1996), there was little ability to prepare (activate) for the learning experience with the artist-educator (acquire), or to consolidate (apply) the learning after the artist-educator's visits, as that approach was seldom embraced with the textbook model.

There was a reticence to challenge the status quo. Even the partnering organization whose mandate it was to support First Nations schools had focused on the resources suggested by the provincial Department of Education, and had mentored those resources within the First Nations schools. Small wonder, as most of the consultants had also gone to schools steeped in the canon of Eurocentric dogma. An Elder in one of our participating communities voiced his fear that our approach was subversive: "I sure hope Ottawa doesn't find out what we're doing." After so many decades and centuries of their knowledge and ways of life having been denigrated and their collective lives marred by racism, there was, at first, little realization, acceptance, and embracing of the internal power to make change. We had to spend much more time fashioning the building blocks for a changed education than originally anticipated.

Although many skilled artist-educators lived and worked in the communities, many were reluctant to come into the schools. We struggled to build a comfort level for people who had long seen the school in a negative light. Some struggled with life challenges that meant that, at the present time, we could not invite them. Not all teachers embraced the concept of including community people as partners, thinking that they had the professional training to be a teacher, and that the artist-educators did not. Others were willing to invite the artist-educator into the classroom, but not to collaborate with them, essentially to consider in some instances that the artist-educator visit translated into a 'spare' for them. Sometimes, classroom management issues translated into teacher reluctance, with teachers thinking that both

they and their students might be harshly judged if behavioral issues marred the visit.

We struggled with the experience and expertise to make the program work, both at the university level and at the school level. Even with only five schools, with the administration of the program and a university teaching load, I was stretched to provide the necessary support as the principal investigator. It was no surprise that the school that experienced the most success was the school that was geographically closest to Brandon. If the bulk of the funding dollars were to be earmarked for the communities, then the expertise had to be sought and developed within the communities. We struggled with resources, financial and personal, to make that happen. While the community-based coordinators were chosen at the school level, if the coordinator was from the community and a teacher, there were advantages and disadvantages, because they knew community members but they also could become entangled in community politics. If that coordinator was an educational assistant, they lacked the credibility among the teachers, as well as the knowledge of curriculum, to integrate the program. In the beginning, because of ease of administration, several communities focused on after-school initiatives, which while commendable, served fewer students and did not address the underlying purpose of the project, which was to effect curricular change. Often the program struggled at the community level because of changes in staff. Whether those changes happened at the level of administration or classroom teacher, the new people were more concerned about getting used to their new role, without anything that would have been perceived as additional work.

Any change process does involve additional work, at least at the beginning, what is usually referred to as the 'learning curve'. Our program of artist-educator in-school involvement included an assumption of staff willingness to make changes, and included support for teachers to move forward with the initiative with some comfort. There were frequent school visits to mentor the program. We had only one on-campus professional development day for teachers of the participating schools; that one-day initiative was not enough, and all the schools did not participate. All school staffs were offered the opportunity to engage in post-graduate work that would support the change initiative. Only one school took advantage of that offer for graduate classes to be offered within their community, with the travel to that particular school of teachers from a second school, upon the insistence

of their administrator, who had been with the program since its inception. The participating school hosting the graduate class became more and more engaged in the program, supporting a full week's professional development for their teachers, and declaring that indigenizing the curriculum was now an expected way of teaching in their community's schools, that it was the 'way we do things around here', thus institutionalized within the school's culture. But the next year, with budget constraints looming and the community threatened with third party management, several of the key supporters of the program left the school. The high school moved into a vacant school in the city of Brandon when the community's high school developed black mold issues, and the elementary school abandoned the program.

Meanwhile, every community struggled with teacher change, the community-based coordinators often feeling that they were islands, desperately trying to convince and support the teachers to invite Aboriginal artist-educators, and to include community people in the school. At times, they lamented that their communities were struggling so much with a poverty of hope that few qualified artist-educators were available to help the students. If only a few artist-educators were invited repeated times, then they would risk being criticized for playing favorites.

To support the teachers, and with less money being used by the communities themselves, we seconded two community teachers to work as curriculum designers, one Dakota for the three Dakota participating communities and one Ojibway for the two Ojibway participating communities. Those people, while also learning to design curricular approaches specific to their culture and language, had only the power of influence within the communities, and also struggled to effect teacher change. As well, the program, both with reference to the funding and the time, could not adequately support the curriculum designers toward their own professional development. The one-year that we could second the curriculum designers from their school communities was simply not enough time.

Given the many challenges for program introduction spanning the first few years, we asked for and were granted extensions. While I was pleased with that approval, I felt, quite truthfully, that we were running out of ideas to counter the hegemonic resistance. I talked to a university senior administrator, who noted that if it were him, he would try every approach he could think of. Dejectedly, I left his office. I wondered what else we could do. I thought that there were no ideas, given the reality of our funding and

our time frame, that we had not already tried. While I still believed strongly in the program, I also knew that my passion was being corroded, and my energy sapped. My struggles were palpable and visible. When a colleague from another university was asked if he was going to consider applying for a similar grant, he replied that he did not have thick enough skin.

There were many individuals who worked against our program, for a variety of stated reasons, and their strength was buttressed by a system that seemed impervious to any real challenges. Our program was being tossed and thrown about by the undercurrent of the status quo as if it was nothing more than a needling persistence, a fragment of flotsam.

In an attempt to keep myself afloat, I decided that I would make a partial move to Winnipeg, that I would retreat there on the weekends. I hoped that the move would give me the strength to see through the rest of the time of the program. But I was becoming cynical. Early on in the grant, one of the Elders who held a prestigious position within one of our partnering organizations had stated that he thought the Creator had chosen me for this role. While I wondered about that at the time, as I am both non-Aboriginal and nearing career end, I now admitted that I would like if the Creator would 'un-choose' me. However, during one trip to Winnipeg, Rosanna Deerchild, an Aboriginal poet and a CBC radio personality, assured me that I did not get to choose when the Creator chose me, nor when or if the Creator un-chose me.

I realized, but only later of course, that I was not driving away from the program, but was being led toward an answer, only part of the puzzle but still an important part. Always a reader, I began to haunt a bookstore in Winnipeg that had many excellent Aboriginal stories, within both fiction and non-fiction areas, and within a number of genres. I escaped into the reading. I was taught and comforted by the stories. I would like to say that the potential of those stories for our program appeared to me like a thunder bolt, but it did not. Initially I was focused more on self-preservation. It took me awhile, and the invitation of my Dean to teach three undergraduate classes in Aboriginal Studies, as well as the suggestions of my teacher daughter, before I realized that there might be a storied approach that would ease the change process, for all of us.

## THE STORIED APPROACH TO CHANGE

Indigenous storywork is not an easy process but is essential to educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit, which is what we mean by Indigenous education. (Archibald, 2008, p. 143)

Complex challenges require multi-faceted approaches for change. Those various approaches often take time to conceptualize, create, and introduce. Answers have to be worked out in the field, step by step (Follett, 1924, p. 176). Like with any large puzzle, often times the pieces are there, but we either do not see them, or seeing them, fail to realize how they might fit together.

The more I read the stories, the more my passion was reignited. I shared the books I was reading. I regaled anyone who would listen with my own stories of what I was learning. Given the slower movement of our program within participating communities, we had some funds and decided, almost as a default 'what can we show for our program' decision, to create a library of on-campus resources that our communities could use to support the change process. As well as purchasing many books, we also printed all the curriculum documents that we could acquire from the Manitoba Education website, and purchased many others, both from Manitoba and from other jurisdictions. We accessed supportive literature from many areas, including publications from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation for example. In the midst of all the work to put our Aboriginal Curriculum Initiatives Centre together, my drive and joy returned, this time with a realization that there *were* other ideas and other approaches that needed to be considered for our program.

I also began to realize that an important missing aspect involved our own responsibility as a Faculty of Education. While we were asking our teacher candidates, and our certified teachers, to integrate Aboriginal perspectives, we were not giving them the tools, the resources, and the support to do so. With a troubled shared history of the racist treatment of Aboriginal peoples, many teachers expressed a reticence to become involved at any more than a superficial level (See Soleil, St. Denis, & Deer, 2006, p. 13; Deer, 2011, Kanu, 2005, 2011). Many Aboriginal teachers had received little encouragement to integrate their own culture even if they did follow their cultural ways, and many did not, given the systemic efforts to erase the importance of that culture. No one wanted to be accused of cultural appropriation or of ulterior

motives in trying to convince Aboriginal peoples to integrate traditional teachings that had for so long been discounted and denigrated. Our Faculties of Education were doing little to ease the feelings of discomfort. The null curriculum, in ignoring both the absence of the indigenous experience, and in ignoring the ignoring of that absence, seemed to implicate no one while actually implicating everyone.

Within the stories, which had been gifted to us through their publication, there might be a path less fraught with reluctance for everyone, because the stories seemed less threatening. A children's book cannot really challenge the status quo. Right?

There were so many stories. Our library grew, and grew. The stories joined hands in strength and conviction. But, in the classroom, where would we begin, even with the stories? How would their use as agents for change become activated within the classroom?

The opportunity to try out the storied approach came in the form of my Dean asking me to teach three sections of the Aboriginal Studies course with undergraduate teacher candidates. While developing a course outline that would include the storied approach and be immediately applicable in the classroom, I visited a school in Winnipeg one weekend with my teacher daughter. In an early year's classroom, I noted the zippered cases that students used to take books home. Later, my daughter and I talked of the inquiry-based approach that is currently the emphasis in Manitoba. On the drive back to Brandon, the various aspects of this puzzle piece within the puzzle slipped together for me. The teacher candidates could create Indigenous Inquiry Kits (IIKs) that would allow them to focus their attention on one 'doable' area, either that was of strong individual interest and/or that could be integrated into the classroom during their fall teaching practicum placement. In that way, the teacher candidates, and the supervising teachers with whom they worked, could immediately see how they could integrate Aboriginal ways of knowing. Given that by then we had quite a large sized library associated with the grant, and that I had read most of the books, I could guide the teacher candidates in finding resources that would fit within their interest areas, thus making the process less overwhelming. We could ease the fear that they had expressed in not knowing enough about Aboriginal people, and the feeling of reticence around issues of appropriation. We would integrate story, one book at a time. We had the added advantage of a split fall term; with that in mind, the IIKs could be mostly created in a front-



heavy course before the teacher candidates went into their schools, and then be field/classroom tested, and finally then be presented to class colleagues when university classes reconvened later in November. We would, thus, all learn how to improve the process.

I wish that I could say that I nailed it, that the class was wildly successful, and that the teacher candidates were unequivocally excited and embracing. But the truth was that I didn't, and it wasn't, and they weren't. The introduction of change, and working out that change in the classroom, is an emergent process. "Emergent" is a complimentary adjective to describe what is often cynically referred to as "making it up as you go along." The crux as well as the details of all solutions has to be worked out in the field of experiment and practice. As necessary as it is for any second-order change, that experimental approach has limited acceptance in many fields of endeavor. Fortunately, given that the Aboriginal Studies class was a core requirement, and that I was teaching all three available sections that fall, the students had no choice but to persevere with me through the muddling. Again, as with any change process, some immediately saw the potential and embraced the inquiry approach, while some resisted but had to comply. Most eventually admitted the worth of the approach, although not everyone, and particularly not at the time, like a formerly resistant teacher candidate who was thrilled to tell me months later that she had been using her IIK in the spring teaching placement.

During that first year, all the teacher candidates had to include other resources within their kits, as well as books. There were topics such as Aboriginal Athletic Role Models, the Night Sky, Aboriginal Music, the Role of Aboriginal People in the Wars, An Aboriginal Perspective on Colonization, the Senses, and The Seven Teachings (See our website at [www.aboriginalcurriculum.ca](http://www.aboriginalcurriculum.ca) for more topics, and for contributed IIK projects).

During the second year of teaching the class, with only one section of middle-years teacher candidates, there was improvement (See [www.aboriginalcurriculum.ca](http://www.aboriginalcurriculum.ca) for the Aboriginal Studies course outline). I was more knowledgeable about what would work, and what needed to be improved. I was more apt to look like I knew what I was doing even though that there were still shortfalls. There were IIK sample projects from the teacher candidates from the prior year. Again, teacher candidates could choose their focus for their Indigenous Inquiry Kits. The prior year I had required an actual physical kit, and the inclusion of many non-textual resources. It

seemed, at the time, that that requirement may have led to busy work and to the somewhat forced and artificial inclusion of resources that seemed of peripheral use, and so I discontinued that requirement. However, the teacher candidates the second year seemed more challenged to include attention to the multiple intelligences within their accompanying lesson plans, and I was left to wonder if the inclusion of hands-on resources in the previous year served to draw more attention to the need to recognize multiple intelligences within the lesson plans. Another time, I would reinsert that requirement, albeit with a more considered approach.

My own increasing knowledge of the resources also allowed me to expand the course outline and include a focus on documentaries and movies, as well. The final examination was replaced with the requirement to review a film. That move was prompted by a university strike and our shortened time together; however, the initiative served to expand the potential resources that teacher candidates could appreciate for classroom-based inclusion. As well, in the second year I included a requirement for a professional growth assignment, entirely of the student's own choice but that would expand the teacher candidate's knowledge of and appreciation for the contributions of First Peoples. The variety of choices was remarkable, from snow shoeing a long distance, then making bannock over a fire and eating it; to presentation of their IIKs to their cooperating teachers and school staffs; to connecting more closely with their Aboriginal students and learning from them; to watching even more films. As in the previous year, teacher candidates kept journals about their growth, and presented their IIKs for all their class colleagues. That latter aspect was important so that everyone could learn from and appreciate the many approaches that an Indigenous Inquiry Kit could take.

An unexpected gift of our second year came in the form of an invitation from one of the schools in Brandon School Division to participate in a professional development day whereby the teachers in that school would learn of the various Indigenous Inquiry Kits. We celebrated that our teacher candidates were being asked to assist in the professional development of certified, seasoned teachers. One of the teacher candidates was subsequently asked to teach his IIK focus in several classrooms in the division. Given that his topic was *How Tricksters Teach Us About Ourselves* and that he was a spirited presenter himself, he was in high demand.

More than during the first year, when I was struggling for direction and thus so were the teacher candidates, what was clearly evident in the second

year was the transformative power of story. We began our time together by reading Sherman Alexie's autobiographical adolescent novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*, also a different initiative from the first year. Although Alexie is American, his lived experience in an impoverished reserve and his attempts to fit into a public school off that reserve speak to the experience of many of our Aboriginal youth in Canada. Thus, in a storied way, teacher candidates increased their awareness of the current lived realities of many of our students in Manitoba reserve communities. The guiding questions helped to focus their attention to their perceived role, as a teacher, in the protagonist's life (See [www.aboriginalcurriculum.ca](http://www.aboriginalcurriculum.ca) for the guiding questions). The teacher candidates loved the book, and one used it for a novel study during her fall teaching practicum. There was some reticence about the book expressed by one student, however. Given her religion and her home town, she expressed a discomfort with the references to masturbation by the protagonist, an adolescent boy. Thus, it must be remembered that not all resources work for all schools.

While simultaneously reading the book and sharing in professional growth dialogue around the guiding questions within class, as well as listening to and learning from an Elder and a teacher from one of our participating First Nation schools, teacher candidates were selecting their IIK focus areas and signing out books to read and review. As this class was taken during the second year of their program, it was assumed that teacher candidates were coming into the class with knowledge of and some experience with the Manitoba curriculum documents and the *Success for all Learners* lesson plan framework. Lesson plans, coming after the book review assignments, had to include learning outcomes from various subject areas. In both years of the course, a collaborative approach with the colleague teaching English Language Arts Across the Curriculum allowed teacher candidates to produce a larger assignment project that would satisfy the requirements for both classes.

The importance of the stories evolved into more than an appreciation of their worth as good literature and their flexible use in realizing curricular outcomes. As the class progressed, it seemed more and more that students were embracing the teachings of the stories and gaining in knowledge and appreciation of Aboriginal peoples, while also realizing that those stories taught them how to live and relate to their world. Truly, the teacher candidates were learning "the power of stories to educate the heart" (Archibald, 2008, p.

83). One teacher candidate, for her professional growth assignment, decided to approach her daily run in a different way. She lived in a rural area, and every day she plugged her music in her ears and set out for a long run. Then one day she decided that she would leave her music behind and instead listen to and learn from her natural surroundings. Upon her return from her run, she wrote of flopping onto the ground and just looking into the sky. It seemed that she opened up and became of the world instead of just running on the ground for exercise. For many teacher candidates their interest was palpable. The student with the Trickster IIK, when I spontaneously invited him one day to join a meeting with folks from another school division, passionately described his IIK and his fascination with the trickster character, noting its presence in so many cultures over the world that seemed to have had no contact.

Through the experience of the class, I came to a new appreciation of the challenges within the participating communities. While there certainly was resistance to the implementation of our program within participant schools, some of that resistance simply had to do with not knowing how to integrate Aboriginal ways of knowing. When artist-educators were invited into the classroom, teachers still struggled with the Activating (i.e., preparing for learning) and Applying (i.e., consolidating and extending learning) aspects of the lesson plan. As such, the artist-educator visits often seemed like a parachute 'Acquiring' initiative with no connection to prior knowledge, and no consolidation of learning. What took me so long to realize and to accomplish was a 'doable' approach to second order change. I needed to be able to work out at least part of the answer in my own classroom, taking the initiative to try the storied approach myself to see if and how it might work for the teacher candidates, then working the next year to improve the approach. The stories could be integrated within either one or both of the Activating and Acquiring aspects of the lesson. By the time I had figured out a way to indigenize the curriculum with an approach that was not only achievable but that would be perceived as achievable, we had run out of both grant time and funds for our participating schools.

#### AN OPEN-ENDED STORY

Good stories are both mortal and immortal. They are mortal in their specific detail, immortal in their transformation. . . . Stories must be tended and attended. (Sanger, 2007, p. 18)

As the success of our storied approach reached practicing teachers more broadly, there was increased interest in our program. Our Aboriginal Curriculum Initiatives Centre continued to expand and to draw teachers and consultants. On campus, the use of the Centre also evolved. Many came to read the books and to learn from them. Other students came in to sit and talk, or to do assignments and study together. One student who was mourning a classmate's passing asked if she could just come in and be there for a while, if it was all right if she just sat and ate her lunch. I invited her to have a coffee, too, if she wished, and left her alone with her thoughts. Another time a colleague from Brandon School Division came in just as I was leaving at the end of the day for a supper meeting. She made herself comfortable in a soft reading chair, I left, and she let herself out when she was ready to go. Often the Aboriginal people who visited would pause at the door, look around, and say, almost in an awed whisper, "I can't believe that our people wrote all these books." The stories embraced all those who entered and listened. And they reached out for them, as we also included four large bulletin boards with rotating displays in our Faculty of Education hallways, and two foyer presentations, one on the Seven Teachings and the other focusing on Métis history and culture.

Particularly in the spring with on-campus classes for the teacher candidates from PENT (Program for the Education of Native Teachers), the Centre became a hub of activity. The PENT students, coming from many reserve communities in the province, work in their schools for seven months of the year as educational assistants, and come onto campus for classes from the first week in April through to the end of July. They have served as great ambassadors for our Centre, and for indigenizing the curriculum in their own schools. They have access to some books in their schools but also through borrowing from the library at the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC) or the Instructional Resource Unit under Manitoba Education.

When the PENT students came into the Centre it was exciting to help them with their assignments. Even if they had just a few stories in their schools, I told them, you can approach the process from that direction. You could, as we were doing in the Centre, begin with the curriculum outcomes that you wanted to meet, and choose the stories that would work to help meet those outcomes. That is great if you have lots of stories, and if someone can support you in selecting a collection of stories that might work for you.

Or, I said, if you do not have that support, or at least not yet, then you can still begin with a story that you know. Even if there is just one Aboriginal story in your school at the time, begin with that book, and think of all the curricular outcomes across grade and subject areas where you could use that story, in combination with the visiting knowledge keepers from the community. As we were working closely with the curriculum documents, I encouraged the students to lobby for the ready access to all those documents while in their home communities.

Our Centre expanded to include many other resources as well as books, including films, puppets, animal figurines, puzzles, and other manipulatives. By this time, I realized that the times of deepest resistance were over, and that so were my dark days. My passion, joy, and excitement had returned. I loved working with teachers and teacher candidates, integrating the resources, the curriculum documents, the particulars of their classrooms, and the dynamics of their communities to come up with a combination of resources and support that would work for them. Changes *could* happen, not only one story at a time but also one teacher and one lesson at a time. Every morning when I came to work, the stories embraced me. Our on-campus team worked well together and cared for each other at a deeper level.

We were being invited to share with school divisions from Winnipeg, and emerging from the grassroots, teachers were visiting the Centre in ever greater numbers. I knew then what I should have known sooner, that teachers still wanted us to devise an approach for them that was familiar, that was for many an elaboration of what they had maybe been already doing—except using indigenous story—and that encompassed the inquiry approach that the province was encouraging. The mushrooming of Aboriginal books at every level, well-written, wonderfully illustrated, and covering many genres and reading levels, made our work richer and deeper. As well, the number of excellent Aboriginal films had significantly increased as many talented actors make their mark and tell the stories of the experiences of Aboriginal people.

The change process will continue to evolve. The progress will be slow in its forward movement, however. Educational systems, provincial and federal, are not yet providing the funding to purchase the necessary indigenous resources. Currently, the schools with full-time teacher librarians, a necessity if the storied approach is to become institutionalized, are few and far between. Even avid readers need the time for building familiarity

with the resources and their potential use; thus, teacher librarians need to have significant release time. Preferably, teacher-librarians would also be classroom generalists and have an almost memorized familiarity with curriculum, as well as wide knowledge of varied pedagogical strategies, and sufficient capacity for the in-school professional development support needed by teachers. Because indigenizing the curriculum cannot progress without knowledge of curricular outcomes, classroom teachers will need consistent support from a number of specialist consultants in keeping up their understanding of those outcomes and the various ways that they might be met. As well of course, teachers also need release time for working with the resources, as well as encouragement to extend their learning at the formal graduate level.

Indigenizing the curriculum is compatible with many current pedagogical practices that are being supported within the province of Manitoba. The inquiry approach to teaching is elaborated within the provincial document *Independent Together: Supporting the Multilevel Learning Community* (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003a). Diversified instruction has long been promoted within the *Success for all Learners* document (Manitoba Education and Training, 1996), for example, and all schools are being encouraged to support *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into Curricula* (Manitoba Education & Youth, 2003b). We have been moving away from the textbook approach; thus, the elaborated use of a variety of resources and pedagogical strategies places teachers in the right mindset for indigenizing curriculum, in conjunction with all the other necessary supports, as noted. Schools and school divisions can develop their own School-Initiated Courses (SICs) and School-Initiated Programs (SIPs) for provincial credit (Manitoba Education, 2013). In southwestern Manitoba, for example, the closest First Nation to Brandon, Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, has developed and is teaching its own School-Initiated Course on Sioux Valley history. As yet, however, this course has not been picked up and made available for students in the surrounding public school divisions, giving credence to Archibald's 1995 statement: "Locally developed Native Studies curricula are accepted more readily and used more meaningfully in band-controlled schools than in the public school system" (p. 310).

It will still take some time before schools are ready to invite Aboriginal knowledge keepers into the school as full participating partners in education. Even at the end of our grant, we had to admit that the time seemed not yet

to have come for widespread acceptance. While there was increasingly more willingness for that participation, a model for ease of implementation still has not been worked out in practice. Even in 2013, affirming Battiste's comment from 1995, "Aboriginal communities that have assumed control of their own schools [and even more so public schools,] are still plagued by questions of how to implement Indian education in the twenty-first century" (p. xiv). "Good things are happening but they are elusive and hardly indicate an established trend. They nevertheless indicate some possibilities and show that systems can be developed by and for Aboriginal people that are of benefit to all Canadians" (Hamilton, 2001, p. 151). But we need more funding, more personnel, more time, and certainly more collective commitment.

The most striking lived example of the worth of our program would not have happened without visiting community artist-educators. One of our grade nine students, totally disengaged with the school process, became interested when his teacher, our community-based coordinator at the time and later our Dakota curriculum designer, introduced beading in her art class. In conjunction with that activity, as well as with other initiatives, many artist-educators had been invited into the school. One day the young man asked this teacher what it meant to walk the Red Road, and his teacher directed him, appropriate in Dakota culture, to the male visiting artist-educators from her community. Soon the student's work in all subjects was improving, and within a few short years, he graduated as the valedictorian of his Grade 12 class, joined the military, and returned to the school as a visiting artist-educator.

Our participating reserve communities had the courage to join in our program when no public schools would touch it. Any success that comes out of our initiative is theirs, because they also persevered through the tough times of transition. In one particular school, the use of Aboriginal literature is now the norm, and the students are excelling beyond the provincial averages in many aspects of their provincial test scores.

We are travelling full circle, perhaps in concentric circles. And we are finding that the return to indigenous story validates not only our Aboriginal students, but all of us. As we learn through the power of story, we connect to the humanity of the story, and learn that our First Peoples have much to teach us, as indeed they always have. For now, it is all right, I think, to begin by embracing the printed stories, learning from them, and using them in our classrooms. We all need these stories to be part of our healing journey, I think. I know that I did.



We cannot change the mistakes of the past. But we can honour the stories as we learn from the past to create a shared future. The future will not duplicate the past as it was before European contact, as the effects and continued legacy of colonialism cannot simply be erased; rather, “the new collective subject . . . needs new ways of telling its story” (Taylor, 2004, p. 175) and having it received and embraced. Our stories, all our stories, can create a pathway for a stronger, validating education, but we do have to listen. For the stories will teach each of us—if we are willing and can learn to listen to them—how we might serve as an agent for change. That is the power of the story. We are and always have been *in* the story, in negative and in positive ways. As we move forward, how we write our individual and collective storied autobiographies as change agents may yet create a powerful move toward a humanizing education that embraces the ways of knowing of Aboriginal peoples. We can, thus, also be *of* the story. But that is our choice. The work will continue to be difficult. Thus far, we are making small changes to the status quo, and we celebrate that success together. As Richard Wagamese (2012) would remind us, we are “changing the world, one story at a time.”

Several years ago, as part of our university’s Stanley Knowles Distinguished Visiting Professor (SKDVP) initiative, we invited Tomson Highway (e.g., 1988, 1989, 1998, 2001) to our university. He sent his materials to me, as I was putting his nomination package together. Included within his initial submission was a draft of a story entitled *Hearts and Flowers*, written as a contribution for the collection entitled *Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada’s Past*. The story of Aboriginal people finally receiving the vote, it is told through the eyes of eight-year old Daniel Daylight, who plays the piano, as does Tomson Highway, a trained classical pianist. Daniel’s struggle to understand what it means to be human speaks, I think, to our own challenges. As the story concludes, we see that Daniel, with a white girl, has just won a duet competition, and he is travelling with his teacher Mr. Tipper:

Daniel Daylight sits inside Mr. Tipper’s travelling car. It is cold—not cold, though, like outside, of this fact Daniel Daylight is quite certain. He looks out through the window on his right and, as always, sees white forest rushing by; maybe rabbits will bound past on that snowbank in the trees, he sits thinking. Snow falling gently, it looks, to Daniel Daylight, like he is being hurtled through the heart of a giant snowflake. In his black-trousered lap, meanwhile, rests his trophy, a

ten-inch-tall golden angel with wings outspread and arms wide open, beaming up at her winner through the glow of the travelling car's dashboard lights. On the radio, the music had stopped and people living in the east of the country, explains Mr. Tipper, are discussing a matter that takes Daniel Daylight completely by surprise: the Indian people of Canada, it seems, were given that day, the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, 1960, the right to vote in federal elections, in their own country.

"You see?" Daniel Daylight says to Mr. Tipper, his English, and his confidence, having grown quite nicely in just two months. "We are human. I knew it. And you know why I knew it, Mr. Tipper?"

"Why, Daniel Daylight?"

"Because I played it." (Highway, 2004, pp. 198-199)

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This paper highlights on the importance of harnessing ICT resources to suit learners'™ cultural environment (Indigenized Concept Cartoons in Science Education) for intellectual restitution.Â Indigenizing Applications. K. Plakitsi (ed.), Activity Theory Science Education Curriculum Content using Concept in Formal and Informal Science Education, Cartoons in Nigeria. Importance Of Curriculum. Every successful concept and project in life requires a proper framework and planning. This relates to all processes, including education. Whenever we embark on any new plan or procedure, we need to make sure that we have all the plans drawn up.Â He also explained "The Curriculum" as the course of deeds and experiences through which children grow up into adults and get going for success in the society. A curriculum is more than putting together a set of academically required subjects. It must consider all aspects of the student life, the learning needs of students, the time available for the sessions and the teachers'™ idea, capability and workload. Now that we know the constitution of a curriculum, let us study its importance in the lines that follow. Indigenizing teacher education programs is important not only to build capacity for all teachers, but also to create learning environments that are more welcoming to Indigenous students. It can also facilitate "reconciliation through education" by incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and being in all classrooms. This report is a record of the outcomes of the symposium and will be shared publicly to increase awareness of the need for and current work related to Indigenizing teacher education on local and national levels.Â 3. Work with Indigenous peoples to recognize the importance of land-based education, prepare teachers in Indigenous education, and challenge existing systems. 4. Share and disseminate culturally appropriate resources and information.