PATHWAYS TO UNDERSTANDING

A RESOURCE FOR SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND CULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM

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Introduction
Supporting Children's Indigenous Language

The teaching activities in this resource are drawn from collaborative action research that K-12 teachers and early childhood educators from remote Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Sweden designed and carried out with their students. The Northern Oral Language and Writing Through Play (NOW Play) Project brings together early childhood educators and teachers from rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Sweden to develop practices, and tools for supporting children's Indigenous language and cultural learning and their overall language and literacy.

Although each teacher/ team of teachers geared their action research project to their own educational setting, they shared the overall goal of supporting students' Indigenous language and cultural learning and/ or their writing through land-based, experiential, and play activities. Teachers and early childhood educators presented their action research at the 2024 Gathering of NOW Play Partners. We put together this resource to celebrate teachers' research and to invite you and other teachers to adapt and try out the activities in your classrooms.

You will find a detailed explanation of the teaching activities used to teach language in NOW Play research locations in several continents. Each description includes a context for each teaching situation, the objectives of the particular teaching activity, an outline of what the teachers did, and a summary of the outcomes of these activities, including pictures of the work.

Roots of Wisdom
Fostering Connection Through Indigenous Plant Knowledge

CONTEXT

Roots of Wisdom took place in Northern rural Alberta, on Treaty 8 Territory, the Traditional meeting grounds of the Cree, the Beaver People, and the Metis District 14. This activity featured mentorship between students in grades one, two, and seven, and provided an opportunity for intergenerational learning. Groups worked with a Knowledge Keeper who guided the land-based learning activities to promote the Cree language.

OBJECTIVE

- To foster mentorship between students
- To promote leadership, responsibility, and intergenerational learning
- To enhance knowledge of Indigenous worldview, culture, and language
- To deepen students' connection to the environment through on-the-land experiences
- To engage students in learning about Indigenous medicinal plants and their uses

What They Did: On-the-Land Experience with Knowledge Keeper

All Grades

- Grade seven students were paired with younger peers. Knowledge Keeper Starwalker explained how the peer mentoring bond modelled traditional Indigenous values of intergenerational caretaking and responsibility.
- Older students guided younger ones as they walked on the land gathering seedlings.
- Starwalker taught students how to identify plants and seeds, and how they are used in Indigenous medicine.
- Students played interactive games to reinforce traditional plant uses and knowledge.

Grade One

- Played "Headbands," a guessing game in which students ask questions to identify plant features
- Created Pokémon cards using art and writing to show knowledge of plant healing abilities
- Planted pine seedlings that were gathered in the previous fall and discussed and observed plant growth
- Students participated in five creative centres to reinforce learning

Grade Two

- Drew pictures and wrote reflections about plants and land-based learning experiences
- Created skits with dioramas to illustrate traditional plant uses
- Planted seeds and discussed and observed plant growth
- Played games matching plant names and uses

Grade Three

- Worked in groups to match seeds to names and reach a consensus.
- Wrote reflections on their relationship with the land
- Created skits about human connections to Mother Earth
- Planted seeds and discussed and observed plant growth

OUTCOMES

Cultural Awareness and Connection to the Land

Students gained cultural awareness as they listened to Knowledge Keeper Starwalker's stories and learned local plant names and uses in traditional medicines. Through land-based experiential learning, students learned about their cultural identity and connection to the land. According to the teacher's reflections, students commented about the way their activity of gathering seeds might have harmed some of the local plants as they stepped on them, demonstrating an awareness of their role as steward and keeper of the land. One student also reflected that the rosehips they saw in winter also grew outside their house, demonstrating cultural awareness through application of Indigenous teachings in their personal life.

Students work together to discuss seeds and plant uses in a classroom.

During a land-based learning excursion, older students had the opportunity to lead, mentor, and help younger students in their learning. This older student (left) helped a younger student navigate his wheelchair through difficult terrain.

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Knowledge of Indigenous Plant Uses

Through experiential education, students were able to engage more deeply with Starwalker's teachings of plant use in traditional Indigenous medicines. The students expanded their learning through planting the seeds and observing the plants' growth over time. Through play- and art-based learning, students consolidated their learning even further. According to teachers' reflections, the "Heads Up" guessing game was effective in engaging the grade one students' memories of their knowledge of Indigenous plant names and uses. The grade two and seven groups also consolidated their learning through theatrical play, organizing skits about traditional plant uses and their connections to the land.

Leadership, Mentorship, and Consensus-Building Skills

The grade seven students were paired with younger peers as they walked on the land gathering seedlings. At the beginning of the walk, Starwalker explained that this peer mentoring bond between older and younger students reflects Indigenous values of intergenerational care and responsibility. As they walked, the older students demonstrated responsibility for their younger peers, guiding them along as they fell behind, and protecting them from getting too close to the lake. According to one teacher's reflections, a grade seven student who was paired with a younger student in a wheelchair was seen pushing that student for long periods of time as they walked on the land. According to teachers, the grade seven student in question had experienced behavioural issues in the weeks prior, requiring their parents to be called. This reflection demonstrates that mentorship helped older children develop values of care and responsibility, and that this responsibility was effective in helping them develop and nurture positive behaviours.

Consensus-Building Skills

The students demonstrated consensus-building and group thinking skills in the classroom as they reflected on their land-based learning. They reached a consensus as they completed an activity to identify features and uses of the plants and seedlings that they saw on the land. The teachers reflected that the students demonstrated increased teamwork skills, as children who typically participated most enthusiastically yielded to quieter students to reach a group consensus. Since the activity mobilized students' unique experiential learning toward a group objective, they learned to take turns and work together to accomplish their goal.

Writing Engagement

The students demonstrated increased writing engagement as they completed activities in the classroom. The grade two and seven groups developed their writing skills in multiple genres beyond standard prose, applying their knowledge of medicinal plant and seed uses to write skits, podcasts, and reflective pieces. According to one teacher's reflections, the Pokémon card activity was very effective, as children used writing and art to create cards based on the popular children's television show. The students were careful to use proper punctuation and spacing between letters as they created cards about the plants and seeds used in Indigenous medicine.

A Knowledge Keeper leads students in a land-based learning activity. Here, she teaches them about a pine cone and what it is and what it does for the trees.

Stories of Mobs, Maps, and Meaning
Exploring Indigenous Language and Culture

CONTEXT

Stories of Mobs, Maps, and Meaning took place in a regional community on the border of Victoria and New South Wales. The student participants included children aged 3-4 in a children's centre with a play-based focus. Teachers included one early childhood teacher and two diploma-qualified educators who work with the small group of children. An Indigenous engagement support officer supported this work.

OBJECTIVE

- To support children's Indigenous language learning
- To enhance cultural knowledge and identity
- To improve children's early literacy skills

What They Did: Three Reading Sessions

The class regularly commenced sessions with acknowledgement of country, an opportunity to show respect to the traditional Aboriginal groups of the land.

Session 1: The teacher read Gregg Dreise's *Awesome Emu* (2021) to the children. The book uses English and Indigenous names for animals and contains descriptions of Indigenous cultural practices and artifacts.
- Activity: The Indigenous engagement support officer brought emu eggs and calling sticks, and explained how these artifacts were used on the land
- Children drew pictures to communicate what they learned

Session 2: The teacher read Venetia Tyson's *My Lost Mob* (2015) to the children. The Indigenous engagement support officer used the book to teach Indigenous knowledge of using landscapes, numbers, and patterns to track animals.
- Activity: The children used art to communicate what they had learned, tracing tracks in sand trays and painting with ochre
- The Indigenous engagement support officer described how ochre is made, and explained its significance as a pigment for Indigenous painting and storytelling

Session 3: The teacher read *Our Mob* (2023) to the children, a book by Jacinta Daniher, Tayler Hampton and Seantelle Walsh. The teacher used the book to teach words for greetings in many Indigenous languages from all over Australia. The book also describes different cultural activities from each Indigenous group.

- Activity: Children located different cultural groups on the map of Indigenous Australia
- The Indigenous engagement support officer taught the children how to crush ochre, and the children used the pigment to create their own bark paintings
- The teacher engaged children in conversations about their creations, giving them the opportunity to share and describe what they had made

OUTCOMES

Strengthened Connection to Place

By exploring cultural maps and traditional greetings, children were able to foster a deeper understanding of place. They engaged in discussions about Indigenous Australia to foster understanding and connection. In an activity which involved students looking at a map of Indigenous Australia, the teacher asked, "What land are we on?" to which a child successfully replied with "Dhudhuroa land." This process allowed them to articulate their connection to their own land, embrace its meaning, and participate in acknowledging country, thereby enriching their relationship with place on a profound level.

Students attend storytime and listen to a book that teaches Indigenous language and cultural knowledge.

Indigenous Language Development

Through reading books written by Indigenous authors, children were able to connect traditional knowledge and cultural practices with Indigenous languages. While reading Our Mob, children learned about the different Indigenous cultures across Australia and their greetings, developing an awareness of the various Indigenous languages spoken in those lands. While reading *Awesome Emu*, the children learned Indigenous names for animals in Australia and demonstrated their understanding through conversations with the teacher and pictures they had drawn.

Enhanced Cultural Knowledge

With the support of the Indigenous engagement support officer, the children gained hands-on experiential education about Indigenous cultural artifacts, paint-making, art-based storytelling practices, and hunting practices. While reading Awesome Emu, the children were able to connect deeply as a result of the cultural knowledge as the Indigenous engagement support officer passed around an emu egg and calling stick for the children to examine. The children demonstrated their understanding of the cultural knowledge through applying traditional Indigenous tools and practices to their artwork.

Above: A student's drawing and writing exercise details an experience. The prompt: "We read the story *Awesome Emu* by Greg Dreise, we learnt about what an emu collar is used for and looked at an emu egg then they drew a picture about the story."

Right: Students handle an emu egg and learn about the life cycle of the emu.

Indigenous Terminology and Meaning

English Word	Indigenous Word
Emu	*Dinewah*
Grey Kangaroo	*Bundar*
Awesome	*Djiraboo*
Eagle	*Maliyan*
Crow	*Waan*
Lake	*Billabong*
Foot	*Tjina*

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Learning in Harmony
Building on Culture, Community, and Connection

CONTEXT

Living in Harmony took place in a kindergarten situated on Ngāti Tūwharetoa lands. The local Te Reo Maori language is taught and spoken in the community, and the research was conducted from a Maori-centric lens: "By Māori, with Māori, for Māori."

OBJECTIVE

- To support children's Te Reo Māori and early literacy skills
- To connect children with Māori traditions, culture, and identity
- To help children become autonomous and independent learners

What They Did: Reading, Learning, Performing

Step #1: Elders gifted teachers with traditional chants to teach the children
- The chants told stories about Māori land, culture, and ancestral history, deepening the children's understanding of their cultural identity and their physical environment.

Step #2: The class practiced their chant for 15 minutes daily
- The teachers taught chants to children according to traditional guidelines
- Some students were familiar with songs from previous years
- Children quickly learned new chants by pairing words with corresponding actions

Step #3: The class read books retelling traditional stories the chants were based on
- The readings included interactive activities to enhance language skills and vocabulary
- A "point to print" method was used to help students understand the direction of print
- Students were encouraged to complete the sentences and stories and add their own interpretations

Step #4: Families and Elders participated in the cultural learning process
- Teachers shared vocabulary from the chants on the Storypark app (https://ca.storypark.com/). This ensured that parents and grandparents were informed of their children's exploration of language, identity, and culture
- The Storypark app allowed families to practice vocabulary at home

Step #5: Performance
- Children performed their traditional chant at a cultural gathering

Indigenous Language Confidence

Children demonstrated language confidence through the tone and frequency of their voices. According to the teachers' reflections, their students' voices became louder and stronger as they practiced their chant.

The teachers also heard their students singing in the school's medicine gardens and throughout the learning center, indicating that this confidence extended beyond the classroom.

Cultural Awareness

The students demonstrated cultural awareness as they practiced their chants (Moteatea). One student, Aria, learned to chant in rhythm with a drum that she played throughout the performance. The Moteatea has a complex rhythm, requiring significant skill to master.

Through the performance, the students demonstrated a deep engagement with Te Reo Maori language and advanced knowledge of traditional rhythmic patterns, highlighting the role of cultural learning resources to enhance their language and cultural experience.

Self-Directed Learning

Children demonstrated self-directed learning as they began organizing the Kapa Haka formation on their own. The teacher positioned the children on a number mat, with boys sitting in the front and girls in the back. Over time, the children started sitting in the Kapa Haka formation without the need for the teacher to prompt. Children asked, "Should we sit Kapa Haka?" when

they came to class, and arranged the mats and positions on their own. Older children often took on leadership roles, guiding younger children to find their correct positions. In some instances, children even took on teaching roles, explaining to teachers that "this is how the chant goes."

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Elders made music witht the students. Through the performance, the students demonstrated a deep engagement with Te Reo Maori language and advanced knowledge of traditional rhythmic patterns,
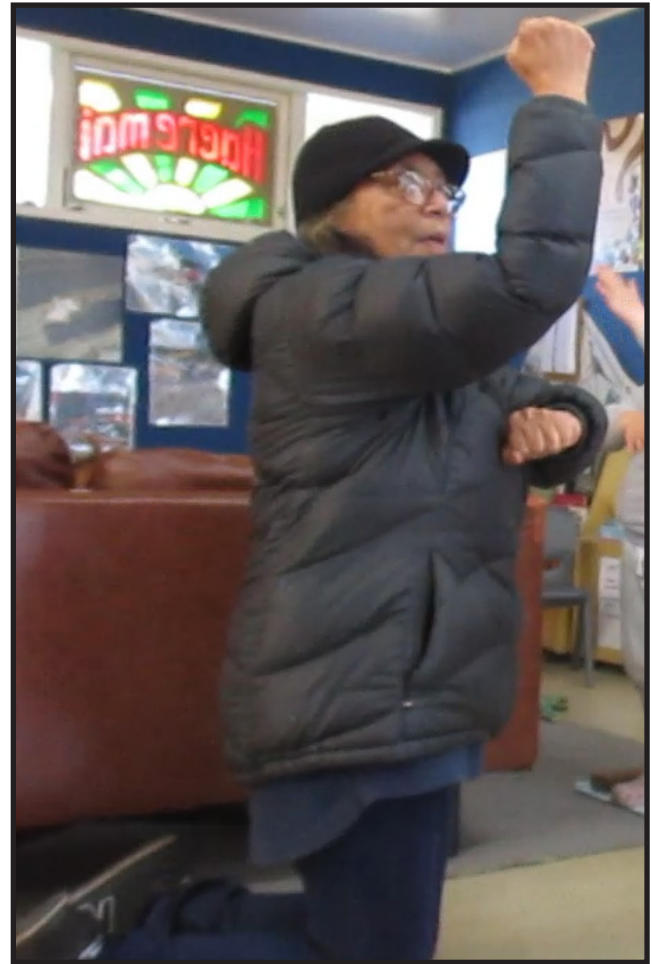
Elders teach students traditional songs. They taught traditional dance. Above, an Elder demonstrates arm movements that accompany a traditional melody to guide students in both rhythm and cultural meaning.

Indigenous Terminology and Meaning

Ngāti Tūwharetoa	A Māori tribe	*Tikanga*	Rules/rites
Iwi	Tribe/kinship	*Pakiwaitara*	Stories
Ngātoro-i-rangi	A Māori ancestor	*Moteatea*	Chants
Marae	Sacred ground/ communal meeting	*Taiopenga / Tūwharetoa*	Cultural festival
Ariki	Leader	*Kaumātua*	Elders
Tamariki	Children	*Kupu*	Words
Kaiako	Teachers	*Maunga*	Mountain
Whakapapa	Ancestry	*Pūrākau*	Traditional story
Te Reo Māori	The Māori language	*Whānau*	Family (extended)
Kapa haka	Performing arts	*Waiata*	Songs chants

Playful Connection
Crafting Language Through Joyful Gatherings

CONTEXT

This resource was developed with the help of three Sámi communities in Northern Sweden. Indigenous student groups gathered in a traditional meeting space to learn language skills and cultural knowledge from Sami-speaking educators and Knowledge Keepers. The Sámi language groups involved in these activities have a contentious history. The gathering mobilized social cohesion as a facilitator of learning.

OBJECTIVE

- To support students' Sámi language learning and use across three dialects (Ume, South, and North Sámi)
- To strengthen and develop locally suitable and culturally sensitive teaching practices
- To provide breathing spaces outside of general student population for Sámi students to explore personal and cultural identity
- To provide opportunities for Sámi to be on traditional land

What They Did: Community Gatherings

- Teachers sent letters to parents and educators to recruit Sámi students to participate in three cultural gatherings
- Challenges included persuading parents to overcome historic conflicts to send their children to the all-Sámi gathering
- Emphasizing the project's goals of preserving culture and revitalizing language, the letters persuaded parents to let their children participate in the gathering
- Children were encouraged to use Sámi as they conversed throughout the gatherings

Gathering #1 - Me and Sapmi: Storytelling and Traditional Singing
- Students gathered around a fire (*Árran*) as a large group to discuss the cultural commonalities between Sámi communities
- The fire grounded the gathering, ritualizing the act of coming together and teaching students how to behave in a cultural gathering
- Students gathered in smaller groups to discuss the cultural idiosyncrasies of their individual communities
- Teachers told stories connected to the *Árran* through conversation and traditional songs (*yoiks*)
- Students selected stones from a nearby river that represented their connection with the land

Gathering #2 - My Sapmi: Traditional Crafts

- After being paired into three groups based on their language level, students:
    - painted their Sámpi (traditional homelands) onto blank canvases
    - crafted traditional clothing for blank paper dolls.
    - drew pictures of themselves, emphasizing their own unique individuality
- Teachers interfered as little as possible to ensure freedom of expression

Gathering #3- Sapmi and the World

- Students created films to share their culture and language with non-Sámi individuals
    - Students were free to decide which aspect of Sámi-ness to highlight
- Students and teachers co-created unique version of the board game Monopoly
    - Objective was to preserve rather than own land
    - Features of the game were adapted to include traditional Sámi land, traditions, language, and history
- Students' played "Skabma Snowfall," an online game inspired by Sámi stories and beliefs

OUTCOMES

Social Cohesion Among Sámi Peers

While students were painting their visual expressions of Sámpi, one particular group collaborated to create a shared vision of Sámpi. Teachers observed students discussing a foundational idea, colour choice, and relevant Sámi vocabulary, working like "clockwork" to bring their group vision to life.

Enhanced Cultural Identity and Connection

A gravel road had been recently installed above the nearby river, causing the new gravel to fall into the river and mix with the native stones. When students selected stones from the river, teachers noticed students actively searching for the native stones rather than artificially added gravel to represent themselves. When asked why they chose the native stones, one student responded: "I am from this place, this stone is from this place, so it felt right."

Enhanced Understanding of Tradition

Students wanted to learn the meanings behind the features of traditional clothing, providing an opportunity for cultural learning. For example, teachers explained that the position of a hat communicates the direction a person is walking. While one student had recognized this behaviour in her own family, the teachers' explanation enhanced her understanding of this tradition.

Reconciliation

During the third gathering, one group with Ume, South, and North Sámi students made a film showcasing traditional clothing from each of their cultures. Rather than wearing clothing from their respective traditions, each student wore clothing from another's culture in a demonstration of unity. Each student made sure that their tradition's clothing was worn correctly.

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Indigenous Terminology and Meaning

Sámpi/ Sábmi/ Saepmie	Cultural region and identity
Árran / Árnnie / Aernie	Fireplace for communal gathering
Duodji / Duöjjie / Duedtie	Sámi handicraft
Vuöllie/vuolie/vuolle/luohti	Traditional Sámi singing
Ovttastallan	Community
Oktavuođat	Connection/Relationship
Ovttasbargu	Collaboration
Árbemáhttu/árbbiemáhttuo/aer-piemaahtoe	Traditional knowledge
Saar-aahka	Goddess who splits the firewood into two

Top left: Students play a Sami version of Monopoly. Top right: Students paint together.
Bottom: This photo is from our September 2023 gathering. The pupils have created a symbolic fireplace, Árrán, common for all language groups. The fireplace symbolizes the importance of each participant in a common context. During this meeting, the Sami pupils got to know each other, to tell things about themselves and to ask others about their lives. For some pupils, this was the first time they met other Sámi pupils who speak different Sámi languages.

Graphic Texts Taught Me Who I Am
Knowledge-building Through Graphical Storytelling

CONTEXT

These activities took place in an Indigenous community on unceded territory where the local Anishinaabemowin language is taught and spoken in the community. Students struggle with reading and writing. This activity saw seven grade eight students learning in a level-up class (a level-up class groups students by academic ability and has a single teacher in the core subjects).

OBJECTIVE

- To ignite interest and engagement in reading and writing
- To build students' confidence in reading and writing
- To improve students' literacy skills
- To help students connect with their personal and cultural identities

What They Did: Wrote and Illustrated Stories

Step 1: The class took a trip to a local lake with community Elders
- The Elders told stories connected to the land and the Anishnaabe culture, using as much of the Anishnaabemowin language as possible

Step 2: Back at school, the researchers and teacher demonstrated features of storytelling using graphic texts
- The researchers performed a graphic e-book in character for the students, highlighting features of graphic novels such as settings, characters, and speech bubbles
- The teacher guided the class as they gathered to read a story through pictures, building their confidence to tell stories without reading or writing
- The education assistant found the website for Pixton (https://www.pixton.com/), a paid graphic novel writing software, and demonstrated how to use it to map out their ideas into panels

Step 3: The students used Pixton to create their graphic novels
- The teacher elicited ideas from students' conversations about their land-based experiences and Elders' teachings to help students create their stories
- The Pixton software empowered students of all literacy levels to tell their stories, while encouraging them to develop their reading and writing skills
- Difficulties included over-reliance on technology in some instances, as one student use text-to-speech to write his story
- The students shared their final stories with each other and with their families, who were excited to see the students' interest and engagement in reading and writing

Developing Literacy Skills

Multi-modal technology like Pixton software can empower students with various needs and literacy levels to participate in the same storytelling activity. The software facilitates students' creation of settings, characters, and action through picture-based storytelling, as they map out their stories with panels. With the storytelling scaffold in place, students can write dialogue and narration at their own level. The stories are told through pictures and text, whether the text involves simple sentences or more complex sentences and paragraphs.

One student's graphic text demonstrates how Pixton can help emergent writers create stories using simple sentences and graphics together. He wrote a story about a fishing trip with his dog. The Pixton software's graphic features empowered the student to change settings, introduce characters, and support plot development through pictures. As a result, the student could focus on creating simple dialogue to guide his characters' actions.

Another student's graphic text demonstrates how Pixton can help more advanced writers explore complex features of the graphic text genre. The student used the software to create a complex interplay between graphic text features such as text boxes, speech bubbles, onomatopoeia, and advanced literary devices like embedded narratives to tell her story. In this sense, storytelling technology like Pixton can offer rich educational and creative experiences to students of all literacy levels.

Connection to Personal and Cultural Identity

The graphic text exercise was guided by a philosophy of *Wenish Niin*, or "who I am": helping students recognize and articulate their sense of identity in connection with their Anishnaabe culture, their land, and their community. As the class participated in land-based experiential learning and listened to the Elder teachings, students learned more about "who they are," and were able to see their stories and ideas within larger constructs of community and culture.

One student's graphic text was framed as part of a book that discussed "the way of life long ago of being Anishnaabe and learning about the seven Grandfather Teachings past down to our relatives and the creat" (sic). The protagonist in the book encounters animals that tell her about the seven Grandfather Teachings. The author also drew upon Elder's teachings to structure her graphic text, and to reflect on the connections between traditional teachings and personal identity: "Mr. Brian said 'Get all the advice and instruction you can, so you will be wise for the rest of your life.'"

Confidence in Reading, Writing, and Engagement

As students experimented with the graphic textual features of Pixton software, and connected with their personal and cultural identity through land-based learning, they developed a sense of reading and writing confidence.

The Pixton software helped students of all literacy levels understand that they can tell rich stories using both pictures and writing, instilling confidence and providing a practical motivation to develop their writing abilities even further. The students' connections with their personal and cultural identity helped them realize that their ideas are important, and that they are embedded within larger constructs of culture and community, showing them that their stories are part of a traditional intergenerational transfer of cultural knowledge.

The teacher also helped build students' confidence as storytellers by showing them how to read stories through pictures. Before the students started creating their graphic texts, the teacher guided them through an activity where they examined a picture book as a class. She asked the students to describe what was happening in the pictures, to make connections between the events, and to predict what would happen next.
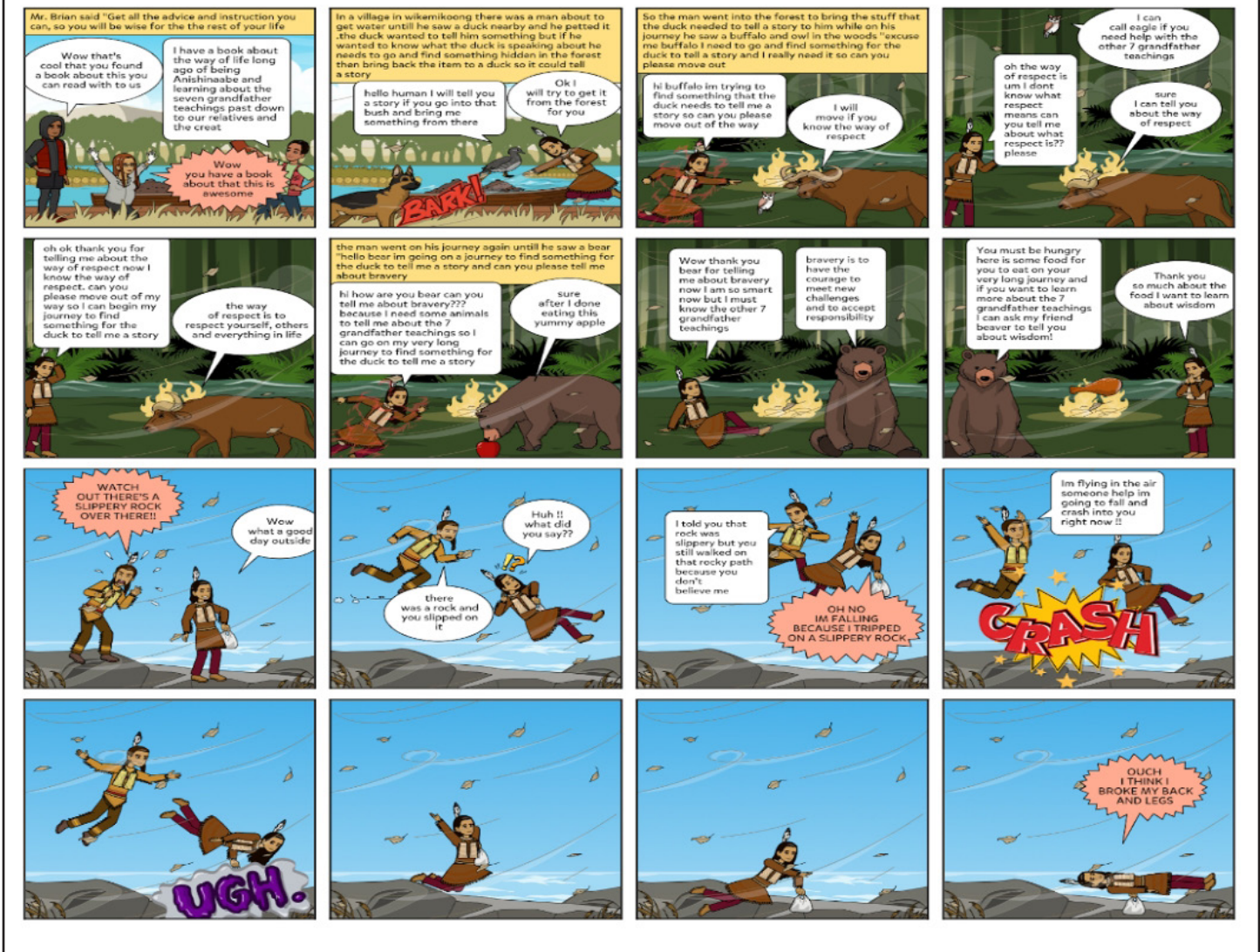
Top: An example of a comic written and designed by students using Pixton graphical storytelling software.

Left: A panel from another student's graphic storytelling.

Finding Ways to Connect
The Local Tłıchǫ and Dëne Sųłıné Language and Culture Through Story Time

Context

Finding Ways to Connect took place in an Early Childhood Education (ECE) Certificate and Diploma Program in Northern Canada. The researchers were five ECE diploma graduates who are teaching and learning the local Tłıcho and Dëne Sųłıné language.

Objective

- To explore the role of storytelling to teach the local Indigenous languages and cultures

What They Did: Engaging in Story Time

- Over the course of two years, instructors engaged in this action research project
  - Year one focused on developing interns as storytellers
  - Year two focused on assessing children's learning
- Instructors supported ECE interns in finding suitable stories for young children
- Interns collaborated with local Elders and Knowledge Keepers on their stories that they developed
- Interns told their story and offered follow-up activities that taught the local Tłıcho (e.g., *ekwo*/caribou, *sadeè*/sun, *dozhìı*/boy, *Tsia*/duckling, *Gagoo*/swan, *det'ocho*/eagle, *dehtsoa*/water stream, *łiwe*/fish, *Tindeè*/Great Slave Lake, *Dehcho* Mackenzie River) or Dëne Sųłıné languages in placements across different early learning contexts
- Weekly storytelling recordings were used for reflections to guide adjustments and add new activities
- Interns also used observation sheets to document their reflections
- Focus groups were conducted toward the end of field placement

Make Personal Connections

One intern, for example, intentionally inserted the names of local lakes in her story to make the story relevant and personal for the children. Two other interns who wanted to make connections to their own Indigenous language and culture selected stories that were passed down by family members or teachers from their communities when they were children. The interns also incorporated either the local Tłıcho or Dëne Sųłıné languages into their stories.

Consider What Stories We Teach

One intern recognized how her story functioned as a bridge across generations. The story shared memories of her grandparents and how they used to live in the bush where their diet was primarily the ekwo/caribou that they hunted.

Consider Various Ways to Engage Children Through Storytelling

One intern, for instance, created and used puppets to engage her audience. All three educators shortened their stories to ensure that they sustained the children's interest. They also found that asking questions during the storytelling process is an effective approach for increasing children's curiosity and maintaining their interest. Observing the audience to gauge when the teller might need to change the pace at which the story is told is yet another strategy one could use to foster engagement.

Teachers staged story time performances with puppets they created to engage students.

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Bridging Language and Culture Through Collaborative Story Workshop

Context

This research, conducted on Chief Drygeese territory, traditional land of the Yellowknife Dene First Nation, involved 24 grade one students (ages 5-6) and two teachers in French Immersion classes. These students mostly learn in French and typically do not speak French at home. They also learn the local Indigenous language (Wıìlıdeh yatı) twice a week.

Objective

- To develop both verbal and nonverbal language, with a focus on French and the local Wıìlıdeh yatı language
- To develop knowledge of story elements (e.g., beginning, middle, end, characters, setting, and problem resolution)
- To develop collaboration through storytelling

What They Did: Learning How to Tell Stories

- *Step 1*: Themed storytelling stations were set up with loose parts (e.g., rocks, logs etc.) and other materials (e.g., toy animals, paint).

- *Step 2*: Teachers introduced story elements and modeled expectations through read-alouds, with loose parts as well as writing/documenting parts of a story. French vocabulary and relevant words from the local Wıìlıdeh yatı language were used to help enhance the lesson.

- *Step 3*: Students engaged in collaborative story creation with materials at their stations.

- *Step 4*: Teachers gathered students to share their stories in a "story congress."

Outcomes

Developing Print Literacy Skills

Some students transferred their stories to print either in pairs or individually. Typically, the students wrote summaries of their story using invented spelling or other words provided through a word wall or when the teacher would write down a list of words that the students could use when crafting their story.

Developing Language Skills

Students engaged in oral storytelling in multiple languages (e.g., English, French and the local Wılı̀ıdeh yatı language). For example, students planned ideas in English but orally narrated their stories in French. Students were encouraged to the use the local Wılı̀ıdeh yatı vocabulary (e.g., *gah*/rabbit, northern animals, counting 1-10, common greetings such as hello and goodbye). Students also used gestures and sound effects when using loose parts to create their stories. Some students contributed only non-verbally and as time progressed, moved to more verbal contributions using French. Additionally, students incorporated key vocabulary to indicate transitions for their story (e.g., *un jour*/one day, *soudainment*/suddenly).

Integrating Story Elements

Students created stories with the appropriate structure (e.g., beginning, middle, end, characters, setting, and problem resolution). Students included drawings that corresponded with their story events, character or setting of the story. For example, if they included a beaver in the story, they would draw a picture of a beaver and then write the name of the beaver character next to the picture drawn.

Developing Collaborative Skills

Students collaborated by providing a French word to each other. Students also made up a French word (*kické*/kicked) and then used the word multiple times, thus validating each other's language. They used this made-up word because they did not know the word for kick in French. They decided to use the English word (kick) and French-ified it (*kické*). The students would also come up or invent a story together, deciding what material to use and add to their story (e.g., adding a shark or starfish for a character). Due to the activity's open-ended nature, students who typically would not play together were collaborating on their stories due to shared interests in loose parts of story ideas.

Loose parts and toys that students use to create stories for each other.

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Passing Down Language and Cultural Knowledge

Context

This research took place in an Early Childhood Education Diploma Program in Northern Ontario. The work included five family members and Knowledge Keepers from two Northern Ontario Indigenous communities. Some of the interviews were completed in the local Anishinaabemowin language.

Objective

- To learn from Elder community members and knowledge keepers how to teach language and culture of community to young children

What They Did: Engaging in Story Time

- ECE students and their instructor created a set of questions for a conversation with community members:

1. What type of toys or games did you play out in nature as a child?
2. How do we make baby bundles out of birch bark?
3. What rules or boundaries did you have when you played? Why?
4. What legends and stories affected the way you played?
5. What basic commands should we teach children when outdoors?
6. What age should we start with teaching children about the outdoors? What would you start with?
7. I am curious to know if men only taught the boys and women the girls regarding teachings for outdoors.
8. I am curious to know about fishing. Is there something you would share with children prior to teaching them how to fish? How would you teach children to fish?
9. When do children "stop" playing and being children? What was their first job?
10. Were any holidays or birthdays celebrated? If so, what did the celebration look like?

Teach on the Land

Students looked at the land and see potential for play, making toy skidoos out of cardboard and tin, birch bark baskets, and learning to track animals while incorporating the language.

Teach Through Legends

Legends were used to teach lessons and tell stories about what to be afraid of (e.g., wolves, breaking bones on big stones). Students used a (cultural) book to conduct a story walk. Students walked along a trail and placed each page of the story along the trail.

Anishinaabemowin Glossary

Birch bark	*Wiigwaas*
Elder	*Kichii aa*
Children	*A'pinoochiinshak*
Baby bundle	*Waapi chii pi zon*
Cradle board	*Tikinaagan*

Teach Through Modelling

Without direct instruction, teachers modeled actions like making a fire and tea, gathering wood, planting seeds, etc. Children learned rules and boundaries through observation and participation.

Teach Through Imagination

Students used open-ended materials from the land (e.g., sticks) to play.

Left: Students wear snowshoes in land-based learning experiences. Right: Students conduct a story walk.

Colourful Numbers
Wıılıìdeh Yatı Language Learning with UNO

CONTEXT

This research included students in grades one and seven in a school in Northern Canada. In this school, students have a choice of learning Wıılıìdeh Yatı or French as second language.

OBJECTIVE

- To improve and increase students verbal use of local Wıılıìdeh Yatı
- To support grade 7 students in developing mentorship skills and knowledge

What They Did: Learn Language Through Play

- *Language learning through play*: The teacher made vocabulary a poster that detailed numbers and colours
  - The teacher would model saying card number and colour in Wıılıìdeh Yatı and students would repeat it
  - The card game, UNO, was easy, familiar, and rules were less important than language usage

- *Mentorship opportunities*: Teacher selected fluent grade seven students with good behaviour and attendance to lead game
  - Dene laws encourage sharing knowledge (to pass on the teachings)
  - Older student acted as language authority by counting and dealing cards in Wıılıìdeh Yatı

OUTCOMES

Increased Language Usage

Playing UNO created a joy in learning and making mistakes together. Younger students became comfortable using unprompted Wıılıìdeh Yatı. For example, one student said he was hungry in Wıılıìdeh Yatı to another speaker. Students began leading the conversation, mixing English with Wıılıìdeh Yatı terms.

Leadership / Mentorship

Grade sevens took initiative to introduce the game unprompted to other students, generating interest even in those who learned French.

Indigenous Terminology and Meaning

dek'o	red
dekwo	yellow
ıt'ǫ̀ą	green
dèhtł'è	blue
Dàòdì	0
ıłè	1
Nàke	2
Taı	3
dı̨	4
sı̨làı	5
ek'ètaı	6
łǫ̀hdı̨	7
ek'èdı̨	8
Łǫ̀tǫ	9

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Grade 7 student leads Grade 1 student in playing the card game UNO.

"Nǫgè is Jiekʼó"
Learning Wılıì ̀deh Yatı with Toy Animals

CONTEXT

This research took place in a junior kindergarten in Northern Canada. Instruction in the local Wılıì ̀deh Yatı languages are offered twice a week.

OBJECTIVE

- To support and promote local Wılıì ̀deh Yatı through play

What They Did: Language Through Land-based Knowledge

- *Introducing Wılıì ̀deh Yatı*: Educators integrated vocabulary into students' lived experience and outdoor education with Northern animal toys
  - Engaging in land-based knowledge is key to language program (eg. identifying Northern animals)

- *Mystery Box*: Educators placed toy animals in mystery box and made corresponding cue cards
  - Students pulled out animal, matched it to cue card and said Wılıì ̀deh Yatı name aloud

OUTCOMES

Increased Use of Wılıì ̀deh Yatı During Play

Educators noticed students used Wılıì ̀deh Yatı terms spontaneously, especially when it came to naming animals. They enjoyed matching the toy animals to their Wılıì ̀deh Yatı cards. The less the students were prompted during an activity, the more they used the language independently. In December, for example, two students began using the word "Nodi" for a wolf while playing with puppets. Another student calls her fox stuffy "nǫgè" and in April referenced that it was "jiekʼó." About half the students count to five independently during transitions, while others are prompted to speak by the teacher saying "sıḷàı sąʔà," and holding up her hand. Toward the end of the year, a couple of parents expressed their excitement and surprise to hear their children counting and naming animals spontaneously in Wılıì ̀deh Yatı.

Indigenous Terminology and Meaning

nodi	wolf
nǫgè	fox
jiek'ó	orange
sįlàɩ sąʔà	give me five

A student plays with animals in the mystery box.

Students making a cook fire in front of a teepee.

Building Stories with Loose Parts
Play-based Storytelling

Context

This research included children aged four to six years in two kindergarten classes in a public elementary school in Northern Canada.

Objective

- To develop students' language abilities through oral and dramatic storytelling
- To improve writing through storytelling
- To encourage collaboration among students

What They Did: Telling Stories with Objects

- *Introduction*: Community storytellers and teachers modelled storytelling by sharing a mix of personal experiences and retelling fictional stories
  - Teachers chose stories that would support students social emotional learning
  - Teachers taught storytelling structures (e.g. beginning, middle, end) and used small groups to analyze how conflicts develop and resolve in a story
  - Teachers introduced individual Wıìlıìdeh Yatı words by language teacher and students from Aurora College

- *Storytelling with loose part*s: Students created stories using objects from the land, classroom, or home including marker lids, rocks, toys, felt squares, wooden pegs, Lego, empty yoghurt containers, and the like.
  - Teachers started by imposing limitations on which materials students could use and gradually gave them more freedom
  - Loose parts were used to dramatize stories, making it inclusive for students of all language abilities
  - Students wrote down stories they dramatized with loose parts

Increased Language Usage

Storytelling workshop gave many students confidence to speak, write, and perform stories in English. When they first started the stories were short, but with more practice and confidence students' interest in and quality of storytelling improved, adding more detail, going from writing a single page to entire booklet based on their workshop stories and experiences. One student who rarely spoke developed more confidence and a larger vocabulary through the storytelling workshops.

Students work collaboratively with loose parts to develop a story. Older kindergartners led while juniors supported.

Student Collaborations

Older kindergartners led while juniors supported. Senior kindergarteners developed by helping junior kindergarteners to create clear endings to their stories.

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