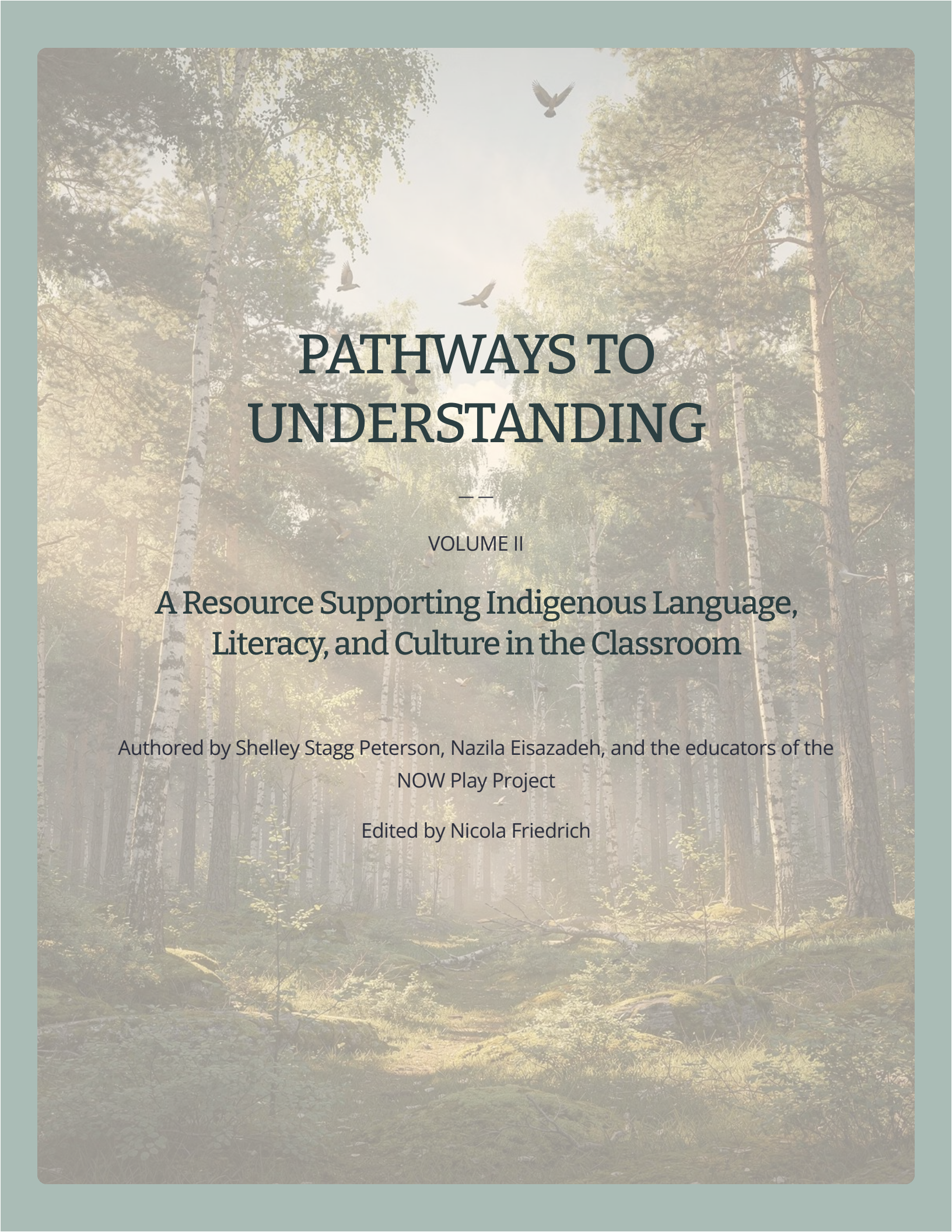


The background of the cover is a photograph of a dense forest. Tall, slender trees with light-colored bark, possibly birches, stand vertically. The ground is covered in moss and fallen branches. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a soft, hazy atmosphere. Several birds are seen in flight against the sky.

PATHWAYS TO UNDERSTANDING

— — —
VOLUME II

A Resource Supporting Indigenous Language,
Literacy, and Culture in the Classroom

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NOW Play Project

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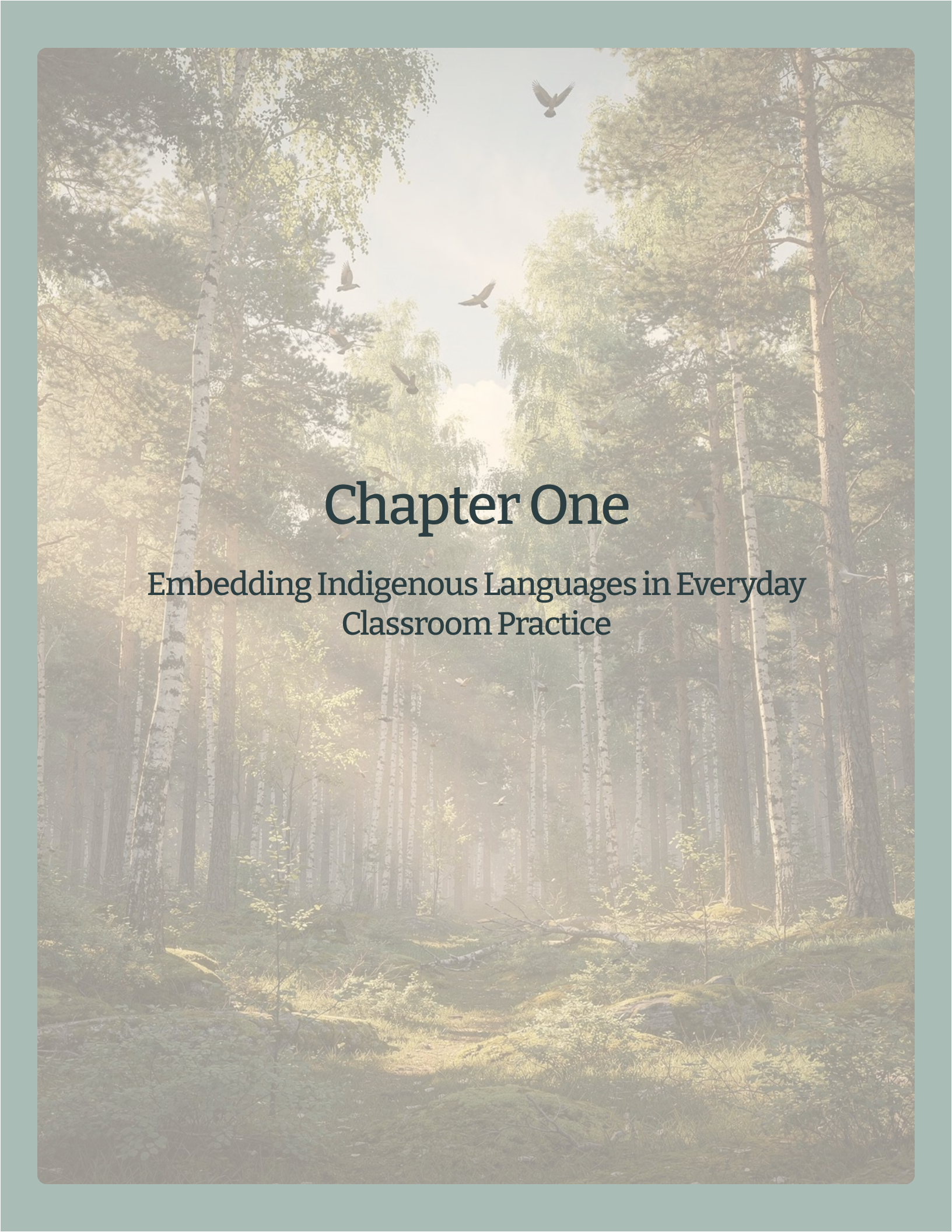
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A misty forest scene with tall trees and birds flying in the sky. The image has a soft, ethereal quality with a light blue and green color palette. The text is centered over the image.

Chapter One

Embedding Indigenous Languages in Everyday Classroom Practice

Introduction

The teaching activities in this volume II resource are drawn from collaborative action research that K-12 teachers and early childhood educators from remote Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia 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 and Australia to develop practices and tools for supporting children's Indigenous language and cultural learning and their overall language and literacy through land-based experiential and/or play activities.

Teachers and early childhood educators presented their action research at the 2025 NOW Play Gathering. 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. 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.



Dramatic Play in Kindergarten

Context

Dramatic Play in Kindergarten took place on the traditional lands of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation on Chief Drygeese Territory in the Akaitcho region with a group of 19 students in Kindergarten, 7 of whom identified as Indigenous.



Objectives

- To incorporate Wìlìdeh Yatı and Tłıchǫ language through dramatic play.
- To generate excitement around language learning.
- To encourage collaboration within the school.



What They Did

1. Planning and Co-Construction

The class teacher:

- facilitated a brainstorming session in which students suggested dramatic play centres, recording ideas on the whiteboard/Smartboard.
- guided students in identifying and listing required props, materials, and resources.
- organized a sign-up process for students to select roles in creating or gathering props and materials.
- facilitated a voting process to determine the final dramatic play theme: Ice Cream Shop, Snow Castle, Magical Kingdom, Animal Hospital, and Santa's Workshop.

2. Collaborative language planning and vocabulary development

- The class teacher and language teacher introduced vocabulary and command phrases related to dramatic play themes and reviewed key Wìlìdeh Yatı words prior to play.

- The class teacher and Indigenous Language Educator developed theme-based Willideh Yati vocabulary sets aligned with each selected dramatic play centre, including functional, descriptive, and conversational language.
- The class teacher and Indigenous Language Educator reviewed and refined student-generated Willideh Yati vocabulary for meaning and accuracy.
- The Indigenous Language Educator translated the words/phrases into Willideh Yati/Tłıchq.

3. Preparation of learning materials and environment

The class teacher:

- developed visual language supports (posters and flashcards) using Google Docs, Tłıchq font, and LessonPix templates based on the translated vocabulary.
- prepared and organized the dramatic play centre by setting up materials, arranging the environment, and supporting transitions into the space.
- placed written word prompts and labels throughout the environment to promote independent use of Willideh Yati during play.

4. Instructional implementation and language modelling

The language teacher:

- introduced targeted vocabulary and command phrases and reviewed key Willideh Yati language prior to play experiences.
- modeled pronunciation, meaning, and contextual use of Willideh Yati during instruction and interactions.
- co-modeled a dramatic play scenario and participated in role-play with students to demonstrate authentic use of Willideh Yati/Tłıchq in collaboration with the class teacher.
- embedded Willideh Yati vocabulary into daily classroom routines, transitions, read-alouds, and shared stories to reinforce language exposure.
- facilitated structured language games (e.g., BINGO, Telephone, Find and Flip) to reinforce vocabulary acquisition.

5. Extension through experiences and collaboration

- The Indigenous Language Educator provided Willideh Yati/Tłıchq instruction through twice-weekly Language Play sessions and weekly classroom visits.
- The language teacher collaborated with the Indigenous Language Educator to align vocabulary selection and ensure accuracy of translations and usage.
- The class teacher organized field trip experiences to extend learning and connect real-world experiences to dramatic play and language use.



Outcomes

Increased Use of Wiilideh Yatı in Context

Students increasingly used Wiilideh Yatı spontaneously during dramatic play and across classroom routines as the language became embedded in both the environment and their play experiences. As the dramatic play centre was co-created and enriched with student-selected themes (e.g., store, ice cream shop, snow castle, forest/dechinta, airport, magical kingdom), children began using Wiilideh Yatı phrases naturally within role-play scenarios. For example, during dramatic play, students were asking their peers to *jəʔitlə* (come), inviting them into the play scenario or offering them a drink, commanding their peers to *na* (take it).

Students were also observed answering phones in role with greetings such as *k'omqəddə həɪzɪ* ("good morning") and closing interactions with *nets'aɪa səðə* ("goodbye"). Everyday conversational responses such as *həʔə* ("yes") and *ɪle* ("no") were also used spontaneously, without prompting, particularly during peer interactions and decision-making moments in play. These uses emerged as students engaged with visual word prompts, modeled language from teachers, and repeated exposure during structured language games and read-alouds.

Increased Vocabulary, Complexity and Independence in Wiilideh Yatı Use

Over time, students demonstrated a steady progression in their use of Wiilideh Yatı during dramatic play, moving from isolated words to more complex and self-initiated language in context. At the beginning of the year, students primarily used single words or short responses, often in response to teacher modelling or prompts. Early language use included foundational words such as *həʔə* ("yes") and *ɪle* ("no"), along with emerging functional phrases such as *k'omqəddə həɪzɪ* (good morning) and *nets'aɪa səðə* (bye).

As learning progressed and the environment became enriched with visual supports, repeated modelling, and structured play opportunities, students began to consistently master and independently use a set of high-frequency functional phrases across contexts. These included action-oriented expressions such as "come here," "come sit," and "I want."

Students also began to extend these familiar phrases by combining them with newly acquired thematic vocabulary. For example, a simple structure such as "I want..." was expanded through play into contextually meaningful

expressions like “I want ice cream,” “I want snow,” or other scenario-based language depending on the dramatic play setting. This demonstrated their growing ability to adapt core sentence structures to new thematic content.

The inclusion of posters, labels, and flashcards in Wiliideh Yati—alongside repeated practice through language games such as *BINGO*, *Telephone*, and *Find and Flip*—supported students in expanding both vocabulary range and contextual flexibility. Students increasingly referenced these environmental supports during play, selecting words and phrases that matched their evolving role-play scenarios.

As the year progressed, students moved from isolated responses to more complex and meaningful language use. Vocabulary introduced through instruction, read-alouds, shared storytelling, and play-based experiences was increasingly integrated into peer interactions. Students also incorporated both teacher-introduced and student-generated language into

their play, showing growing adaptability and confidence.

Alongside this growth in complexity, students demonstrated increasing independence in their use of Wiliideh Yati. They began initiating language spontaneously during play, sustaining peer interactions without adult prompting, and using environmental print strategically to support communication. For example, students would independently refer to visual supports to say phrases like “I want ice cream” or greet peers using learned expressions such as “good morning.”

By the later stages of the project, students were able to engage in longer, more sustained role-play interactions using Wiliideh Yati with minimal teacher support. This shift—from early single-word responses to flexible, contextually adapted phrases embedded in dramatic play—demonstrates meaningful growth in both linguistic competence and communicative confidence.



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Wiilideh Yatı Terminology and Meaning

Term	Meaning
hẹꞑẹ	yes
ìle	no
k'omqòdòqò hoizì	good morning
nets'aꞑa sòqò	goodbye



Strengthening te reo Māori - One Word At a Time

Context

This project took place in Hamilton, New Zealand. The study involved children aged 2–6 years and three teachers. While many children had connections to Māori identity, not all were exposed to *te reo Māori* (Māori language) at home. This highlighted the importance of providing intentional, meaningful, and consistent opportunities for children to engage with te reo Māori in their everyday learning.



Objectives

- To support *tamariki* (children) in developing confidence and competence in using everyday te reo Māori by embedding the language naturally into daily routines, interactions, and play.



What They Did

Kaiako (teachers) intentionally integrated te reo Māori across the daily programme using a range of strategies:

- **Waiata (songs):** Kaiako incorporated waiata into everyday routines, using repetition, movement, and rhythm to support vocabulary development, pronunciation, and engagement. Waiata were also embedded within play-based experiences to reinforce language learning in meaningful contexts.
- **Daily greetings and routines:** Simple te reo Māori phrases, including *mōrena* (good morning) and *kia ora* (hello), were consistently introduced during arrivals and *wā whāriki* (mat time). Kaiako scaffolded learning by modelling greetings, incorporating them into interactive games, and encouraging *tamariki* to communicate with one another using te reo Māori.
- **Modelling and repetition:** Kaiako intentionally modelled te reo Māori throughout the day, using repetition, visual supports, and consistent language to build children's confidence and participation regardless of their previous exposure to the language.

- **Cultural immersion through media and art:** Kaiako introduced *kapa haka* (cultural performance), regional cultural events such as *Te Matatini*, Māori designs, storytelling, and visual arts to deepen tamariki understanding of Māori culture while strengthening connections between language, identity, and cultural knowledge.
- **Creating a language-rich environment:** Kaiako embedded te reo Māori across sensory learning experiences, encouraging tamariki to hear, see, feel, touch, and taste language within authentic everyday activities.
- **Feeling:** Tamariki explored their connections to *te ao Māori* by creating representations of their *maunga* (mountain), *awa* (river), and *whānau* (family) using play dough, supporting identity development alongside language learning.
- **Hearing:** Waiata, *karakia* (prayers), Māori legends, and language-based games provided opportunities for repeated exposure to te reo Māori. Kaiako also developed the *Haerenga i Waikato* (Journeying Waikato) board game with tamariki, incorporating local place names, Māori vocabulary, and familiar landmarks into playful learning.
- **Touch:** Sensory play experiences encouraged tamariki to use te reo Māori while exploring materials through hands-on activities and collaborative discussion, strengthening both language confidence and belonging.
- **Taste:** Authentic cultural experiences, including sharing *kai* (food) on a *marae* (communal, sacred meeting ground for the Māori people) and preparing food for Matariki celebrations, introduced tamariki to te reo Māori while participating in important cultural traditions.
- **Sight:** Everyday visual experiences also supported language learning. For example, a child's curiosity about a kaiako's Māori design shirt led to discussions about Māori symbols and *moko kauae* (traditional Māori chin tattoo), creating spontaneous opportunities for cultural learning and language use.
- **Personalised learning resources:** Kaiako developed personalised te reo Māori booklets based on children's interests. One child's drawings of her whānau inspired all tamariki to create their own family books, incorporating Māori family terms naturally into the activity. Individual interests were also integrated, such as translating "space rocket" as *waka ātea* for a child interested in rockets.
- **Opportunities for expression:** Kaiako supported tamariki to share a short *mihi* (greeting) during daily *wā whāriki* (mat time). Tamariki greeted peers using phrases such as *mōrena*, *ata mārie* (peaceful morning), and *kia ora* (hello), providing regular opportunities to use te reo Māori in authentic social interactions and connect language with their own relationships and whānau.
- **Community and cultural excursions:** Tamariki and whānau participated in visits to a local marae and wharehau, where kaiako supported engagement with cultural protocols including *mihi whakatau* (traditional greeting event used to welcome visitors) and waiata. Kaiako worked collaboratively with whānau before the visit, recognizing that many families had not previously

visited a marae. Ongoing conversations, invitations to participate, and shared preparation fostered inclusive participation and strengthened relationships between the centre, tamariki, and whānau.



Outcomes

Confidence, Identity and Expression

Tamariki developed confidence in using te reo Māori and engaging with te ao Māori. They expressed this through greetings, participation in group interactions, and sharing of their *mihimihi* (the act of greeting). Children demonstrated a growing sense of pride, belonging, and connection to their identities. For example, children increasingly used greetings such as “mōrena” and “kia ora” during daily routines and became more willing to stand during mat time to greet peers and teachers. They also

showed interest in Māori culture by recognising Māori designs and symbols and asking questions about their meaning. Through sharing their *mihimihi*, children demonstrated growing confidence in speaking about themselves and their whānau in front of others. Learning was experienced as a reciprocal process of *ako* (to learn and teach), where children were both learners and contributors to others’ learning, including peers, teachers, and whānau.

Language Development

Tamariki developed increased vocabulary, pronunciation, and understanding of everyday te reo Māori through consistent exposure in routines and play. They began using words and phrases more spontaneously in familiar contexts. For example, children used phrases such as “*whakapai ka!*” during daily routines and showed increasing accuracy in pronunciation over time.

They also began recognising and using te reo Māori beyond the centre, including at home and in conversations with whānau. This included children sharing words, phrases, and pronunciation with whānau, who in turn engaged with teachers about the language their children were learning.

Social Connection and Participation

Tamariki actively engaged in waiata, movement, and group language experiences, supporting collaboration and shared participation. Over time, children developed confidence in leading and participating in group interactions. For example, children participated in turn-taking greeting

games during mat time, gradually increasing their confidence in leading greetings with "kia ora" and selecting peers to participate. Participation in the marae excursion alongside whānau supported a shared sense of belonging and strengthened engagement within the learning community.

Transfer of Learning Beyond the Centre

Tamariki extended their learning into home environments by using te reo Māori and sharing waiata with whānau, demonstrating ongoing engagement with language learning. For example, children used Māori words and phrases at home and shared songs learned at the centre with their families.

Whānau also engaged with the learning by supporting children's use of te reo Māori and participating in marae-based cultural experiences alongside them, strengthening connections between home and centre learning. This reflected a reciprocal learning process of ako, where children, whānau, and kaiako all contributed to language learning and cultural understanding.

Māori Key Words and Meaning

Term	Meaning
<i>Greetings and Everyday Communication</i>	
Kia ora	Hello
Mōrena	Morning
<i>People and Relationships</i>	
Tamariki	Children
Kaiako	Teacher
Whānau	Family

Māori Terminology and Meaning

Term	Meaning
<i>Home / Centre Routines</i>	
Kai	Food
Wā whāriki	Mat time
<i>Language and Cultural Learning</i>	
Te reo Māori	The Māori language.
Te ao Māori	The Māori world, worldview, and way of being
Kapa haka	Cultural performance
Ako	To learn and teach



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Learning Wiìlìdeh Yati Through Animal Play in Junior Kindergarten

Context

This research took place on the traditional land of Yellowknife Dene First Nation in Chief Drygeese territory and involved two teachers, including the school's Wiìlìdeh Yati language teacher and a Junior Kindergarten class of 21 students, approximately 12 of whom identified as Indigenous. The Wiìlìdeh Yati language teacher guided the project by working with the students twice a week.



Objectives

- To promote the use of the Wiìlìdeh Yati language during play



What They Did

- Set up an initial learning activity by preparing a table with a mystery box containing hidden animal pictures to support animal-picture matching.
- Observed student engagement and identified limited interest in matching animals with pictures alone.
- Adjusted the instructional approach by introducing hands-on, multimodal materials such as animal masks, puppets, and fur at a designated learning centre.
- Expanded access to materials by intentionally distributing these resources across multiple centres to support language use during play in varied contexts.
- Integrated books about northern animals such as bears and owls throughout the classroom.
- Supported language exposure through guided book exploration by modelling the use of the target language while identifying animals, actions, and related vocabulary during shared reading (e.g., “Look at that sah eghq!).

- Reinforced the target language during circle time by creating and modelling the use of “language buttons” featuring key prompts and responses (e.g., “What animal is this?” and “This is a ...”), along with various northern animals and corresponding actions (e.g., rabbit hop, raven fly, fish swim, moose run, wolf howl, fox dig, bear growl, beaver builds, eagle fly, owl fly).
- Provided opportunities for independent practice by making the language buttons available during play, placing them on trays to make them intentionally portable.
- Reinforced language learning through structured follow-up games and experiential learning, including:
 - a guessing game where students acted out animals for peers to guess,
 - a scavenger-style game using verbal clues (e.g., “an animal that swims”),
 - outdoor experiential activities (e.g., animal tracking and observation walks).
- Modelled and encouraged consistent use of the target language throughout daily routines by prompting students with “Dì tìch’adi ayì ne?” (What animal is this?) and modelling responses such as “Dì ... ne” (This is a ...), supporting repeated exposure to the target language.
- Classroom learning was shared with families through an educational platform, allowing parents to see and hear the language being used.

Wiìlìdeh Yati Terminology and Meaning

Term	Meaning
det’qcho	Eagle
tsà kò	Beaver
sah	Bear
gah	Rabbit
nqde	Wolf
łıwe	Fish
nqgè	Fox
tatsq	Raven

Wiilideh Yati Terminology and Meaning

Term	Meaning
mòhgwł	Owl
dendì	Moose
nahka	hop
k'ebe	swim
naht'a	fly
k'eda	run
dehgho	howl
deh xàts'ò	dig
ęghq	growl
yehtsł	builds
Dı tich'àdì ayì ne?	What animal is this?
<i>Di ... ne</i>	This is a ...





Outcomes

Recognition and Use of Animal Word

Students demonstrated a growing and increasingly confident understanding of Willideh Yati animal vocabulary through repeated, meaningful, play-based learning experiences. As materials shifted from a fixed, table-based animal-matching activity to flexible, movable centres, students showed greater success in recognizing and using animal words within authentic contexts. Rather than silently matching pictures to cue cards, students began verbally identifying animals during play, naming animals while feeding them in the house centre, identifying animals in books, and using animal words during outdoor

experiences.

This recognition and use of animal vocabulary was especially evident among students who had been largely non-verbal during table-based matching tasks. Through repeated interactions with books and animal-related materials, students demonstrated recall from memory, such as one student consistently identifying an owl by pointing and saying “m̩h̩gw̩l̩” across multiple pages. These experiences strengthened students’ ability to recognize and independently use animal words without reliance on visual prompts.

Active Participation and Repetition

Students’ participation increased significantly as activities were first introduced during circle time and then extended into self-directed, free-flowing play. The introduction of varied tools—particularly the language buttons—marked a notable shift in engagement. Students brought the language buttons to the house centre, carpet area, table spaces, and other learning environments. Children eagerly pressed the buttons, listened attentively, and repeated Willideh Yati animal words, reinforcing pronunciation and familiarity through repetition.

Students frequently gathered in pairs and small groups to replay the audio, repeat the words, and act out the animals together. Participation was joyful and social; students laughed, corrected one another, and even corrected educators when a word was mispronounced, demonstrating confidence and ownership of the language. Repetition occurred naturally during play—while feeding animals in the house centre, matching animals at the playdough table, or acting out animals with peers—supporting sustained engagement and deepening language familiarity.

Spontaneous Integration of Animal Vocabulary

As exposure increased and learning opportunities expanded, students began using Wìlìideh Yatì animal vocabulary spontaneously throughout the day and across contexts. Language use became increasingly natural and unprompted. Students used animal words while playing, during transitions, and even during snack time, often without visual supports. The vocabulary emerged from memory, reflecting comfort and fluency rather than recall tied to specific materials.

Spontaneous language use extended beyond the classroom. During outdoor learning experiences in the winter months, students listened for animals, searched for tracks in the snow, and engaged in playful activities such as finding puppets hidden in trees. On one occasion,

students observed ptarmigans in nearby trees and enthusiastically discussed what they saw, using the target language in a real-world context. Students also transferred their learning across classrooms, with a noticeable increase in language use and enthusiasm when engaging in play in another classroom setting.

This spontaneous integration was further reinforced through home-school connections. One parent later shared that her child began counting to five in Wìlìideh Yatì at home, demonstrating meaningful transfer beyond the classroom. Overall, increased exposure, varied tools, and repeated opportunities to engage with the language supported a shift toward natural, confident, and joyful language use that often emerged in unexpected and unplanned moments.



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Waikatotanga-Kiingitanga

Context

Waikatotanga-Kiingitanga (Local Curriculum) took place in the central North Island, Waikato, New Zealand with two teachers and a group of *tamariki* (children). *Kiingitanga* refers to the Māori Indigenous Monarchy. The group included approximately 15–20 children each day, all except one who were Indigenous, ranging in age from 3 to 5 years old.



Objectives

- To support tamariki in creating a *pao* (Māori oral composition), strengthening their connection to *whakapapa* (family), *te reo Māori*, and *te ao Māori* (language, culture and genealogy)



What They Did

- Posted pictures of *nga wai hono i te po* (the name of the new Māori Queen) to introduce and gain an understanding of the tamariki knowledge of her.
- Discussed her characteristics, role, and presence with the tamariki.
- Explored cultural symbols such as *moko kauae* (women's facial markings on chin and lips), *kapa haka* (cultural dance), and *pūkana* (facial expressions).
- Reflected on leadership, discussing the passing of *Kīngi Tūheitia* (the name of the late Māori King) and sharing memories of his *tangihanga* (funeral rites).
- Connected with iwi-specific knowledge, incorporating references to *tainui* (ancestral tribal canoe), *waikato* (tribal area), and local haka.
- Co-created oral history through storytelling and songwriting, actively transmitting knowledge.
- Developed the *pao*, collaboratively, building on sentence starters such as *He kuini, he kuini, he kuini Māori... e tū nei!* (a Māori Queen has risen) as a group.
- Practiced the *pao* multiple times a day until the tamariki learned the lyrics.
- Prepared for performance of the *pao* by adding movements or actions to accompany the *pao*.



Outcomes

Engagement and Ownership of Learning

Tamariki were deeply engaged in co-creating the pao, demonstrating ownership over their learning process. They actively contributed to lyrics, repeatedly practicing the pao throughout the day. This repetition, along with the documentation of their ideas on the whiteboard, helped tamariki

gradually master the lyrics, internalize the content, and develop focus, confidence, and pride in their work. Through this process, children showed sustained engagement and a strong sense of accomplishment as they prepared for their performance.

Language and Culture and Creative Expression

Language development in te reo Māori was closely intertwined with cultural learning and creative expression throughout the project. Children used Māori vocabulary and phrases in meaningful contexts, describing the Queen, recounting genealogy, and engaging with iwi-specific references such as Tainui, Waikato, and local haka. For example, tamariki explored cultural symbols such as moko kauae, pūkana, and kapa haka when discussing Kuīni Nga wai hono i te po.

Sentence starters like *He kuini...* supported the co-creation of lyrics, allowing children to express ideas, build narrative, and integrate metaphor into the pao. Some tamariki even recited sections tracing the genealogy of the Māori monarchy, combining language skills with cultural knowledge. These experiences reinforced both oral proficiency and understanding of heritage, deepening their sense of belonging within te ao Māori.



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ABOUT THE PROJECT

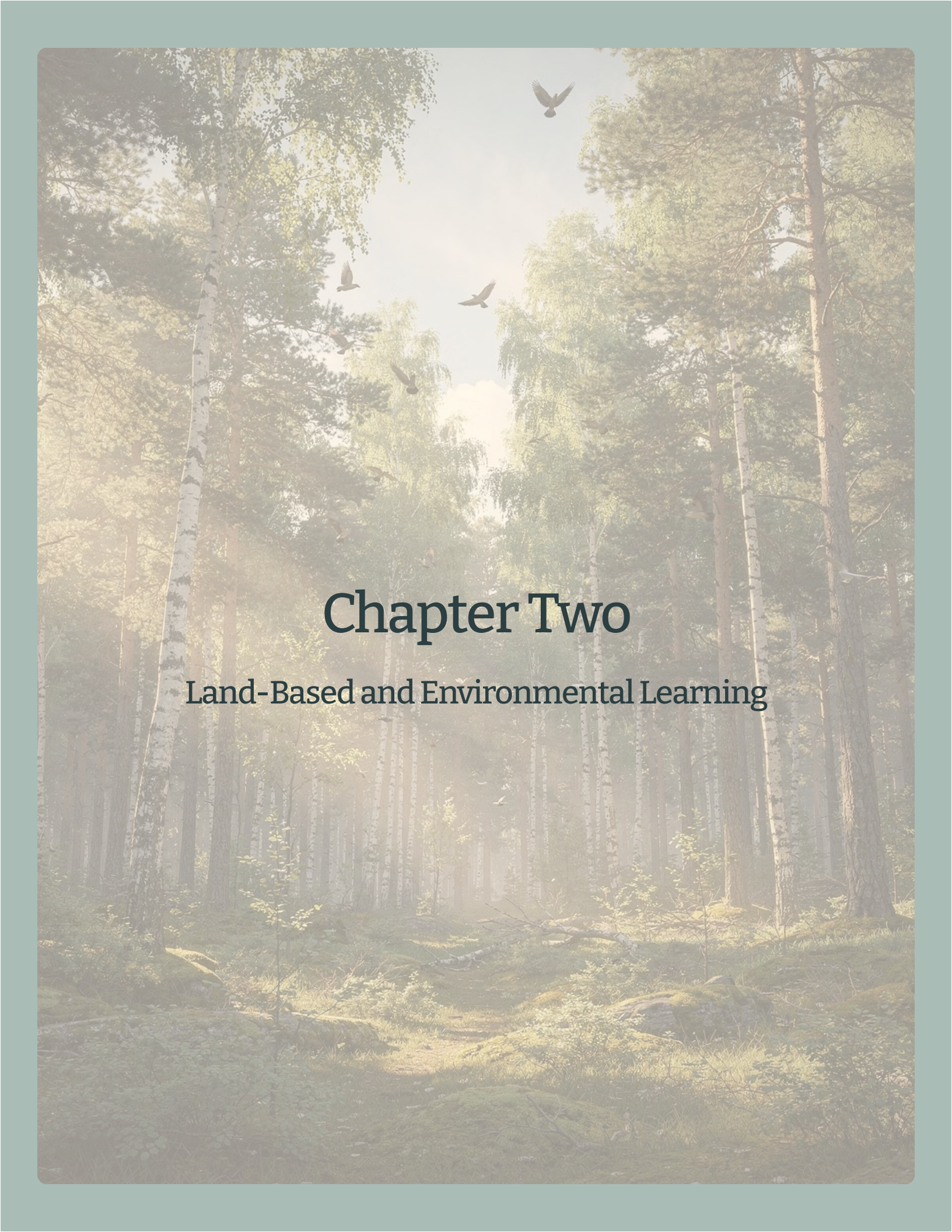
Collaboration and Whanaungatanga (relationships), Leadership and Cultural Belonging

Collaboration and whanaungatanga were central to the learning experience. Tamariki worked together to develop lyrics, practice the pao, and coordinate movements for performance. These shared activities fostered relationships, collective responsibility, and appreciation for each other's contributions. Participation also encouraged leadership, as children reflected on the roles of Kuīni Nga wai hono i te po and the late Kīngi Tūheitia, including the significance of tangihanga

rites. Through active involvement, children recognized that their contributions mattered, strengthening inclusion, confidence, and a sense of belonging within the group. By co-creating the pao and performing it repeatedly, tamariki were empowered as contributors to cultural revitalization, gaining hands-on experience in practicing te reo Māori and engaging with cultural traditions, which reinforced both personal and collective identity.

Māori Terminology and Meaning

Term	Meaning
Nga wai hono i te po	The name of the new Māori Queen
Moko kauae,	Women's facial markings on chin and lips
Kapa haka	Cultural dance
Pūkana.	Facial expressions
Pao	Māori oral composition
He kuini	A queen
Kuini Māori... e tū nei!	A Māori Queen has risen
Kīngi Tūheitia	The name of the late Māori King
Tainui	Ancestral tribal canoe
Waikato	Tribal area

A misty forest scene with tall trees and birds flying in the sky. The image has a soft, ethereal quality with a light blue and green color palette. The text is centered over the image.

Chapter Two

Land-Based and Environmental Learning

Creating Cultural Connections in Woodworking Shop Class

Context

Creating Cultural Connections in Woodworking Shop Class took place in northern Alberta on the traditional meeting grounds of the Cree and Beaver First Nations, Treaty 8 Territory with a group of 18 students in grades 9–11, approximately one-third of whom identified as Indigenous. The learning occurred in a hands-on shop environment, where students were actively engaged in designing and creating woodworking projects using tools such as a scroll saw.



Objectives

- To develop skills with a scroll saw
- To apply Cree and Beaver teachings about animals of the area when creating a scroll saw picture frame of an animal



What They Did

1. Developed cultural knowledge of animals

- Students collaboratively created a PowerPoint presentation about Indigenous teachings specific to Cree and Beaver related to each animal.
- The draft presentation was shared with an Elder for feedback and input.
- Students learned the names of all animals in both Cree and Beaver through instruction from the Indigenous liaison.

2. Chose and prepared their design

- Students selected an animal of personal significance and explained why they felt a connection to the chosen animal.
- They used the internet to find and select their own reference images for their chosen animal.

3. Learned tool use and safety

- The scroll saw was introduced and safety measures were discussed by the teacher to support proper use of equipment.
- The teacher taught students how to approach their cuts, including the sequence of cuts needed when using the scroll saw.

4. Created the woodworking project

- Students began by building the frame.
- They then placed a template of their animal onto a piece of wood.
- Using the scroll saw, they cut out the animal design.
- Students inserted the animal piece into the frame.
- Students stained the wood as part of the process.

5. Worked through challenges

- Some students selected designs that were more difficult, which sometimes resulted in small pieces breaking.
- In these cases, students needed to select a new image and restart parts of the process.





Outcomes

Connection to Family and Community

Students created scroll saw picture frames that reflected family values and were often intended as gifts for friends or family members, directly linking their classroom learning to their home life. Their desire to create a meaningful gift motivated students to put care and effort into their work. For example, one student chose to make a fish because his father was a fisherman, making it a

perfect, personalized gift. Another student received a scroll saw from his grandfather to continue developing his skills, and he was so excited that he returned to school to celebrate this gift. These examples show how the project strengthened connections between classroom learning, family, and community while encouraging students to take pride in their craftsmanship.

Cultural Understanding

Students demonstrated meaningful engagement with Cree and Beaver teachings by selecting animals of personal significance and explaining their connection. Through discussions and project choices, they reflected on the cultural values associated with their animals, articulating qualities such as wisdom, patience, or strength. Students

also incorporated humor and personal interpretation—for instance, they suggested that the teacher should build the elk, since in Cree culture the elk symbolizes wisdom, a quality often associated with teachers. This example highlights their ability to understand, apply, and make culturally significant knowledge personally relevant.



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Cree Terminology and Meaning

Term	Meaning
Maskwa	Bear
Nâpemek	Fish
Mistatim	Horse
Amisk	Beaver
Mahikan	Wolf
Mikisiw	Eagle
wacask	Muskrat
Moswa	Moose
Waapiti	Elk
Apisimôsis	Deer



Learning in the Cabin

Engaging in Wiilideh Yati Language and Dene Cultural Activities

Context

Learning in the Cabin took place at a school in Yellowknife, on the traditional lands of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation on Chief Drygeese Territory in the Akaitcho region. The learning experience involved 26 students in a split Grades 1 and 2 classroom, their teacher, and the school district's Dq Edàizheh Leadership and Resiliency Program Facilitator.



Objectives

- To meaningfully increase students' use of Wiilideh Yati engagement in Dene cultural learning
- To support students' connection to their natural environment



What They Did

Before the lesson

- Designed seven engaging, theme-based sessions focused on snow, ice, traditional sports, caribou, birds, animals, and furs, creating a rich foundation for language and cultural learning.

During the lesson

- Introduced and modelled Wiilideh Yati greetings and vocabulary connected to each theme by using the language while engaged in cultural activities.
- Shared stories and legends in engaging ways (e.g., read a book or enacted stories they told using puppets) that enriched students' cultural understanding and supported language development through narrative.
- Guided students through interactive, centre-based activities and games (e.g., snow painting, *Chih Chih Xah*—also known as *Duck Duck Goose*).
- Provided traditional foods, such as Labrador tea, bannock, and dried fish, showing how they are prepared.

After the lesson

- Students wrote about their experiences using drawings, labels, and emerging written language in learning logs.



Outcomes

Increased Use of Wilìdeh Yatı

Students used Wilìdeh Yatı in classroom interactions, showing increased confidence and independence. They used greetings with minimal prompting and drew on their expanding

vocabulary to name animals during activities such as *Nqdi eyits'q Ekwó* (*Wolf and Caribou*). Their learning logs further reflected this development, as students labeled drawings with Wilìdeh Yatı words.

Engagement in Dene Cultural Learning

Students enthusiastically participated in Dene cultural experiences and frequently asked when “tent day” would take place. Their enjoyment was

visible during activities and was reflected in drawings of themselves participating in the experiences in learning logs.

Strengthened Connection to Their Natural Environment

Students began to notice and describe more detailed features of the land and engaged meaningfully in hands-on, land-based experiences such as plucking a goose. During these activities,

students asked thoughtful questions and shared personal experiences, demonstrating an increasing ability to connect classroom learning with their lived experiences and relationships to the land.

Wiilideh Yatı Terminology and Meaning

Term	Meaning
Nqdi	Wolf
Xah	Goose
Ekwó	Caribou
Chih	Duck
Zhah	Snow



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Makwa Nahnahkeshcikewin

Context

Makwa Nahnahkeshcikewin was conducted in a remote northern Anishiniimowin community with a population of approximately 400–500. The project involved 11 Grade 2 students, most of whom had limited prior ability to speak Anishiniimowin and were familiar with only a few words. This project provided an important opportunity to support meaningful language learning grounded in land, culture, and community knowledge.



Objectives

- To support students' meaningful use of Anishiniimowin in context through land-based, story-based and play-based learning



What They Did

- The teacher invited a local Elder to the classroom to share Anishiniimowin language and cultural knowledge connected to *makwa* (bear).
- The Elder introduced Anishiniimowin vocabulary related to bears, including body parts, colours, numbers, habitats, and different life stages (e.g., cubs and adult bears).
- The teacher displayed images of *makwa* to visually support students' understanding and reinforce new vocabulary.
- The Elder shared teachings about bear behaviours, including hibernation, fishing in summer (especially in rapids), seasonal changes, and how a bear's diet can affect its colouring.
- The Elder explained cultural practices and changes over time, including why bears were eaten in the past and why this practice has shifted in the present day.
- The Elder used humour and storytelling to engage students and make learning enjoyable and memorable.

- The teacher provided opportunities for students to respond creatively through drawing and imaginative play.
- The teacher facilitated circle time and play-based activities using a bear stuffed animal to encourage oral language use.
- The teacher organized a field visit to a local dump to connect classroom learning to the land and community environment.



Outcomes

Vocabulary and Language

Students demonstrated strong growth in their Anishiniimowin vocabulary through repeated, meaningful use of language in multiple contexts. They confidently repeated Anishiniimowin words after the Elder introduced them and consistently used the word *makwa* when referring to bears, showing clear contextual understanding. During discussions about bear body parts, students spontaneously incorporated colour and

number words in Anishiniimowin, demonstrating their ability to combine vocabulary across categories. While singing songs, students accurately pointed to the corresponding body parts, indicating both comprehension and application of newly learned language. These moments reflected students' growing confidence and their ability to retain and use vocabulary purposefully.

Cultural Knowledge and Understanding

Students showed high levels of curiosity and engagement while learning about *makwa* and its significance. They expressed interest in learning more about bears and actively participated in discussions about bear behaviours across seasons. Students demonstrated understanding

of where bears go and what they do during winter and summer, including hibernation and other seasonal activities. Through these learnings, students developed a deeper appreciation for how animals live in relation to the land and seasons, strengthening their cultural and environmental understanding.

Play and Application

Students enthusiastically applied their learning during imaginative play with a bear stuffed animal. As they played, students pretended to eat honey and enacted bear behaviours, naturally integrating Anishiniimowin vocabulary and cultural knowledge into their play. This playful

application showed that students were not only recalling words but using them meaningfully in self-directed, creative contexts. Through play, students demonstrated joy, confidence, and a strong connection between language, culture, and imagination.

Anishinaabemowin Terminology and Meaning

Term	Meaning
Makwa	Bear
Qusawa vakwa	Brown Bear
vapakwa	Polar bear
Makkathe Makuwa	Black bear



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Growing Together

Context

Growing Together in a regional community on the border of Victoria and New South Wales, where a teacher worked with a Koorie Engagement Support Officer and 16 kindergarten children aged 4-5 years (4 students were Indigenous).



Objectives

- To support young children's Indigenous cultural understandings, language and literacy development, and meaning-making through bush tucker plants, including their uses for food, medicine, and connection to land.



What They Did

Session 1 – planted bush tucker plants and shared stories about them

- Introduced four bush tucker plants (Old Man Saltbush, Murnong, Midyim Berries, Native Oregano) and shared their cultural significance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts.
- Shared stories (yarning) about traditional plant use, including food, medicine, and sustainability.
- Used Indigenous plant names and explained plant parts, growth, and uses.
- Demonstrated planting of seeds/seedlings and supported each child to plant their own.
- Showed images of seed, seedling, and mature plants and explained growth stages.
- Modelled plant care practices as the garden developed.
- Supported children to draw and label plants using some Indigenous language.

Session 2 – observed and documented plant characteristics and growth

- Presented examples of plant growth stages and explained observation over time.
- Provided plant leaves and stems for sensory exploration.
- Facilitated clay imprint activities using natural materials.
- Encouraged multimodal and sensory exploration of plants through touch, smell, observation, and tasting experiences.

Session 3 – culinary use of bush tucker plants

- Shared images of bush tucker foods and explained nutritional and medicinal uses.
- Discussed food safety and hygiene practices.
- Demonstrated preparation of Damper using Old Man Saltbush.
- Involved children in food preparation and tasting.
- Facilitated discussion about how foods could be used at home.



Outcomes

Language Learning and Cultural Connections

Children connected their learning to real-world, land-based experiences through storytelling. One child linked gardening tools explored in the first session to home life, sharing, “my dad uses this [tool] still,” showing how learning extended into family contexts.

Children shared fishing and bushwalking stories from home, including what was safe to touch, which plants could be used, and what should be avoided, demonstrating connections between land, safety, and family knowledge.

Children engaged in conversations about bush

tucker plants, recalling and using names such as Old Man Saltbush, Murnong, Midyim Berries, and Native Oregano. They discussed uses for food, medicine (e.g., teas for immunity or remedies for rashes), and cultural significance, demonstrating growing vocabulary and understanding of culture, identity, and community.

Children also described traditional foods such as Damper, made with flour, water, salt, Old Man Saltbush, and lemon myrtle seeds, discussing flavours, textures, and linking these foods to familiar home experiences.

Multimodal Meaning-Making, Inquiry, and Documentation

Children explored plants through sensory experiences, including touching, smelling, observing leaves and stems, and at times picking leaves from stems. They described textures such as soft and smooth and used words such as “nice,” “pleasant,” and “pungent” to communicate their observations. One child connected her sensory experience to home, stating a bush tucker plant “smells like mom’s cooking.”

Children represented their thinking through clay imprints of leaves and stems, drawings, symbols, and other visual forms, demonstrating emergent print literacy through early mark-making, writing, and symbolic systems to communicate meaning beyond spoken language.

This learning was extended through ongoing documentation of plant growth over time. Children observed changes from seed to seedling to mature plant, often measuring plant height at different stages and identifying features such as new leaves, flowers, and changes in size. They used descriptive language such as “They are

growing bigger!”, “It’s taller than me” and “we have to water it lots!” and noticed that saltbush was particularly “hardy” and resilient in the garden.

Children documented their observations through drawings, labels, journals, and visual learning maps, including timelines. These representations supported sequencing, vocabulary development, and early literacy skills.

Children also engaged in shared inquiry discussions about the bush plant life cycle from seed to harvest, including uses such as food and medicine, demonstrating emerging understanding of plant purpose and sustainability. They compared observations and explained what their plants needed to thrive, noting, for example, some plants wilted due to heat or lack of water. This led to discussion about different environmental conditions required for healthy plant growth.

Children revisited learning through photos and videos, using these to reflect and extend conversations over time.



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Grade One Students' Use of Wiilìideh Yati and French Oral Language

Growing Together

Context

This project took place in Yellowknife, NT, with two Grade 1 French Immersion homeroom classes. Both classes regularly participated in an Indigenous Language and Culture class and engaged in outdoor learning as part of their weekly programming. The project followed the Northwest Territories Indigenous curriculum and was grounded in inquiry-based learning focused on trees in the schoolyard.

One class consisted of 20 students, including 6 Indigenous students, while the other class included 22 students, with 5 Indigenous students. Both homeroom classes participated in the project and explored trees that were specific to their immediate school environment.



Objectives

- To encourage students to become familiar with the traditional practices, uses, and purposes of *k'i* (the birch tree), with a focus on trees found in their own schoolyard.
- To foster students' Wiilìideh Yati and French oral language use through outdoor learning, inquiry, art, storytelling, and hands-on experiences grounded in the land.



What They Did

1. Inquiry focused on schoolyard trees

The project began with an inquiry into trees found in the schoolyard. Teachers intentionally aligned the project with the Indigenous curriculum and chose to focus on locally relevant trees, particularly the birch tree (*k'i*), as a way to ground learning in place.

2. Vocabulary introduction through read-alouds and discussion

Key Wiilideh Yati and French vocabulary related to trees, nature, and traditional practices was introduced through read-alouds, classroom discussions, and explicit language modelling.

3. Classroom games (e.g., *Hot Seat*)

Interactive games such as *Hot Seat* were used to reinforce vocabulary. In this game, a student in the “hot seat” guessed a selected word (written or drawn) based on clues given by peers. The games provided repeated, low-pressure opportunities for oral language practice.

4. Scavenger hunts (indoor and outdoor)

Students participated in scavenger hunts to actively find and identify target vocabulary. These activities helped reinforce word recognition and meaning through movement and exploration.

5. Outdoor observation and language use

Students spent time outside observing birch trees and other natural elements. They practiced using Wiilideh Yati vocabulary in context to describe what they saw, including the tree, sap (water), sun, animals, rocks, and surrounding land.

6. Birch tree tapping

Students engaged in hands-on birch tree tapping. During this experience, they used Wiilideh Yati to describe the tree and the process. This activity connected traditional practices with experiential learning and oral language development.

7. Manipulatives and loose parts exploration

Students collected loose parts from outdoors and used them to represent vocabulary words and construct models (e.g., birch trees, tents, animals). These materials were intentionally selected to align with vocabulary learning.

8. Art and observational drawing

Students created observational drawings and watercolor birch tree paintings. These artistic representations became visual supports and backdrops for later storytelling.

9. Story workshop

Students incorporated newly learned Wiilideh Yati and French vocabulary into original oral stories. Storytelling was collaborative and often student-driven, with peers supporting one another in recalling and using language.



Outcomes

Using Visuals and Hands-On Materials to Support Learning

Visual aids, such as flashcards and teacher-created images, alongside hands-on materials and loose parts, supported students' recall, understanding, and use of Willideh Yati vocabulary. These tools enabled students to independently scaffold their learning, explore concepts concretely, and strengthen accuracy. For example, during storytelling, a student paused to recall a Willideh Yati word and successfully used a visual support to find the correct term before

naturally incorporating it into her narrative. Students also collected items from outdoors—sticks, leaves, and other natural materials—to represent vocabulary words such as birch, tent, sun, fox, and rabbit, modeling trees, animals, and other elements. This hands-on engagement reinforced both the meaning of vocabulary and students' understanding of traditional practices, allowing them to connect language to real-world concepts.

Collaborative and Experiential Learning

Students engaged in authentic, peer-supported learning, both indoors and outdoors, which strengthened their vocabulary recall, oral fluency, and confidence. Collaboration allowed students to teach and prompt one another in a natural, student-driven environment. For instance, during a storytelling activity, when one student forgot the Willideh Yati word for “sun,” her peer independently prompted her with the correct term. Peer support also occurred outdoors during

birch tree tapping, as students guided each other in describing the trees, sap, and surrounding environment. Students applied vocabulary in real-world contexts, using Willideh Yati to describe environmental features and sharing observations with peers and family members. These experiences demonstrated authentic engagement, the transfer of knowledge beyond the classroom, and the development of agency in using language in meaningful ways.

Creative and Interactive Language Practice

Students applied newly learned vocabulary through playful, creative, and expressive activities that reinforced oral language use and engagement. They integrated Willideh Yati and French vocabulary into art and storytelling, creating watercolor birch tree paintings that

became visual backdrops for their oral narratives. During Story Workshops, students collaborated with peers to recall vocabulary words, construct original stories, and demonstrate creativity and initiative. Interactive classroom games, such as *Hot Seat* and scavenger hunts, provided additional

opportunities for low-pressure, repeated practice. These activities allowed students to experiment

with language, strengthen fluency, and support one another while maintaining motivation and engagement in both indoor and outdoor contexts.



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Wiilìideh Yati Terminology and Meaning

Term	Meaning
sah	Bear
gah	Rabbit
nihbaa	tent
dzegosa	sun
zah	snow

The Lifeblood of Mother Earth: Incorporating the Nehiyawewin Language into the Classroom

Context

This project, a collaboration between a teacher, an Indigenous Education Support Worker and a Nehiyawewin language speaker, took place in rural northern Alberta. Of the 14 Grade 1 students who participated, five were Indigenous.



Objectives

- To bring Indigenous ways of knowing about water to the forefront with a focus on the Nehiyawewin language and the concepts embedded within the language



What They Did

Step 1: Developed Collaborative Relationships

The teacher and Indigenous Education Support Worker scheduled regular planning meetings to clarify roles (e.g., who would be leading instruction and who would be observing and documenting). They consulted the Nehiyawewin language teacher as needed to ensure accuracy in language use, pronunciation, and cultural teachings.

Step 2: Selected and Integrate Culturally Relevant Resources

The teacher and Indigenous Education Support Worker reviewed and selected resources grounded in an Indigenous perspective, ensuring that they reflected the local Indigenous ways of knowing and emphasized the cultural significance of water. The teacher mapped cultural teachings and Nehiyawewin language learning into curriculum expectations and planned lessons that connected science concepts (e.g., the needs of living things, seasonal changes, weather properties, and local environments with a focus on water) with literacy outcomes in the oral language and writing strands of the curriculum.

Step 3: Introduced Language Through Intentional Teaching Practices

The teacher and Indigenous Education Support Worker used a structured instructional approach that included invitation, modeling, and guided practice. The teacher supported students' pronunciation of Nehiyawewin words through phonological and phonemic awareness instruction of sounds in Nehiyawewin words (e.g., clapping syllables heard when saying the word; isolating and blending sounds found in the Nehiyawewin language to create Nehiyawewin words). Experiential learning opportunities, such as playing phonemic awareness games, reinforced students' learning about the Nehiyawewin words and sounds.

Step 4: Facilitated Follow-Up Learning Activities

The teacher created story prompts to encourage students to explore personal relationships with water, progressing from oral storytelling to visual and written forms. For example, students first shared oral narratives, then translated their ideas into drawings, storyboards, sculptures, and LEGO representations, and finally incorporated written text.

Step 5: Celebrated and Shared Learning

The teacher provided opportunities to showcase learning and celebrate the integration of Nehiyawewin language and ways of knowing about water through classroom displays, library exhibitions, and school assemblies.



Outcomes

Vocabulary Development and Application

Students demonstrated growth in vocabulary development and application through the creation and use of picture dictionaries of Nehiyawewin words (e.g., *nîpîy* for water), with evidence of using this vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Some entries consisted of single images functioning as picture labels, such as drawings of different types of trees (e.g., spruce, oak, apple), indicating emerging vocabulary recognition and categorization. Other students showed a deeper understanding by using vocabulary in more contextually appropriate ways, incorporating actions or settings to convey meaning—for example, representing winter with a snowman,

water with a surfer, or snow through an image of climbing a snow-filled mountain. Many students also connected vocabulary to familiar experiences, using images such as water wings, a dock, or skating on ice to represent words related to water and seasonal activities that they regularly experience in their daily routines or lives more generally.

Beyond the picture dictionaries, students continued using Nehiyawewin words in the correct context during play, classroom discussions, and at home, with some students—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—sharing and using the language with family members.



Making Personal Connections and Showing Pride and Confidence in Sharing Learning with Others

Students demonstrated confidence and pride in their learning when presenting their stories, picture dictionaries, and creative projects to peers and broader audiences. They showed creativity in using the Nehiyawewin vocabulary to tell stories

about meaningful activities in their lives. One student, for example, used correct Nehiyawewin vocabulary when writing about an activity in his life: “I have *wâskahikan* (house) in the *mistik* (tree). I am cooking hot dogs over the *iskotêw* (fire).”



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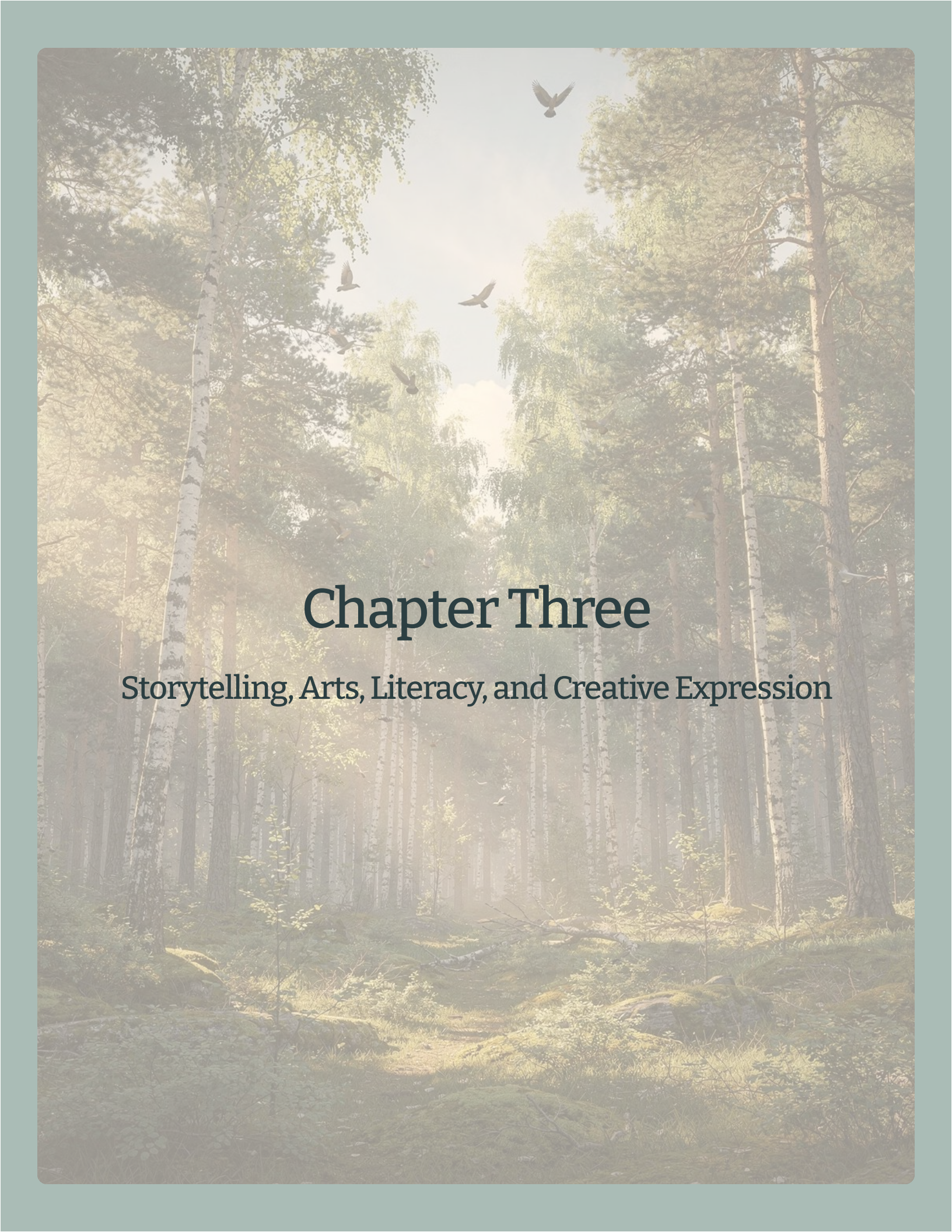
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I am in nîpiy.
 I see the pîsim from the
 nîpiy. The clouds are up
 in the kîsik. I am in the
 nîpiy with my nimama and
 sister. I love to swim with
 my nimama and go down the
 sîp.

Nehiyawewin Terminology and Meaning

Term	Meaning
wâskahikan	house
mistik	tree
iskotêw	fire
nîpîy	water
nimâmâ	my mother
pîsim	sun
kîsik	sky

A misty forest scene with tall trees and birds flying in the sky. The image has a soft, ethereal quality with a light blue and green color palette. The text is centered over the image.

Chapter Three

Storytelling, Arts, Literacy, and Creative Expression

Learning the Traditional Language Through Creating Poetry Together

Context

Learning the Traditional Language Through Creating Poetry Together took place in a First Nation community with a group of 6–7 K4 (4-5 year-old) students. The classroom environment was interactive and culturally responsive, allowing students to explore language through shared experiences and creative expression.



Objectives

- To encourage students' use of spoken and written Anishinaabemowin and English during a poetry unit



What They Did

1. Activated prior experiences through guided discussion

- The teacher began by engaging students in conversation about recent shared cultural experiences, such as digging up carrots out of the school garden, playing in the snow, snowshoeing, and roasting marshmallows around a fire.
- Open-ended and descriptive questions were used (e.g., what things looked like, tasted like, and what students did), encouraging students to share observations and build oral language in both English and Anishinaabemowin.

2. Co-constructed a class poem using student voice

- Student responses were recorded and shaped into a collaborative class poem, ensuring that the content reflected their lived experiences.
- Key Anishinaabemowin vocabulary (e.g., *okaatak*, *ishkote*) was intentionally embedded alongside English to support language learning in context.
- The teacher modeled writing by recording sentences on the board, making the connection between oral language and written text visible.

3. Reinforced phonics and early literacy skills

- The teacher drew attention to familiar letters and sounds from previous lessons from *Jolly Phonics™* within the poem.
- Students were supported in recognizing patterns, sounds, and repeated words, helping bridge prior phonics learning with meaningful content.

4. Supported oral language through repetition and modeling

- The class recited the poem multiple times, with the teacher modeling pronunciation and encouraging student participation.
- Repetition was used to build confidence, fluency, and familiarity with both Anishinaabemowin and English words.

5. Extended learning through multimodal expression

- Students represented their understanding by drawing scenes from the shared experiences described in the poem.
- Opportunities were provided for students to experiment with early writing by labeling their drawings or attempting to write words and sentences.

6. Adapted instruction and explored additional supports

- The teacher remained flexible, trying different approaches to support student learning and engagement.
- As an extension, the teacher considered incorporating audio recordings of key words and phrases (with translations) to support pronunciation and provide an additional way for students to engage with the language



Outcomes

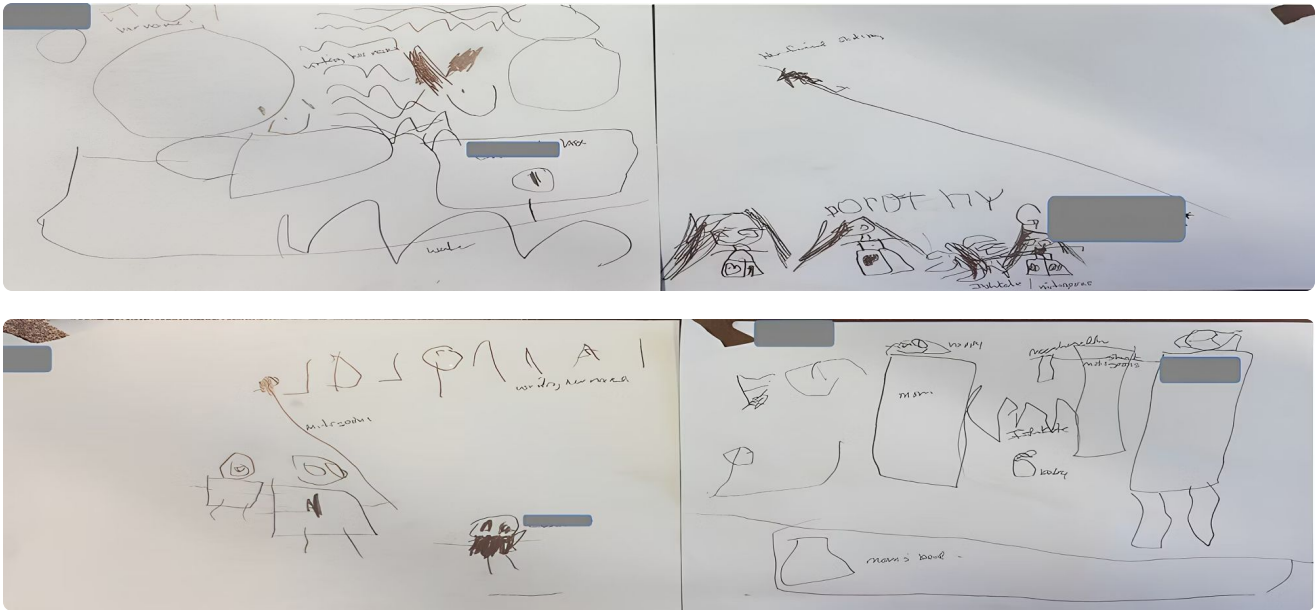
Spoken Language Development

Students demonstrated growing confidence in using and pronouncing Anishinaabemowin words during class activities and discussions. They answered questions about shared experiences using both English and Anishinaabemowin and showed understanding through gestures such as pointing and other non-verbal responses.

Students used and practiced words such as *okaatak* (carrot), *koon* (snow), and *ishkote* (fire), and participated in repeated recitation of the class poem to build familiarity and pronunciation. When asked, for example, what the weather felt like outside, students responded "*kisinaa*" (it's cold), demonstrating their ability to connect

language to lived experience. In another instance, a student pointed out the window upon seeing snow and said “koon,” showing their ability to

recognize and apply vocabulary in a real-world context. Together, these interactions reflected their increasing comfort with hearing, saying, and understanding new vocabulary.



Emerging Written Expression and Meaning-Making

Students connected their lived experiences to both spoken and written language through the poetry activity. By discussing activities such as picking carrots, playing in the snow, and sitting around a fire, they used Anishinaabemowin and English to describe meaningful events. They then represented these experiences through drawings, labeling, and writing, demonstrating their ability to communicate ideas across multiple forms.

Students further engaged with early writing by observing the teacher record their spoken ideas into a class-created poem and identifying familiar

letters and sounds from *Jolly Phonics* within the text. They demonstrated emerging writing skills by adding their names—or letter formations to represent their names—to their drawings and, in some cases, labeling objects or actions depicted in their artwork. Some students also attempted to write words or short sentences connected to their experiences, showing growing confidence in representing language in written form. In instances where students' writing was still emergent, the teacher acted as a scribe to support and extend their ideas.



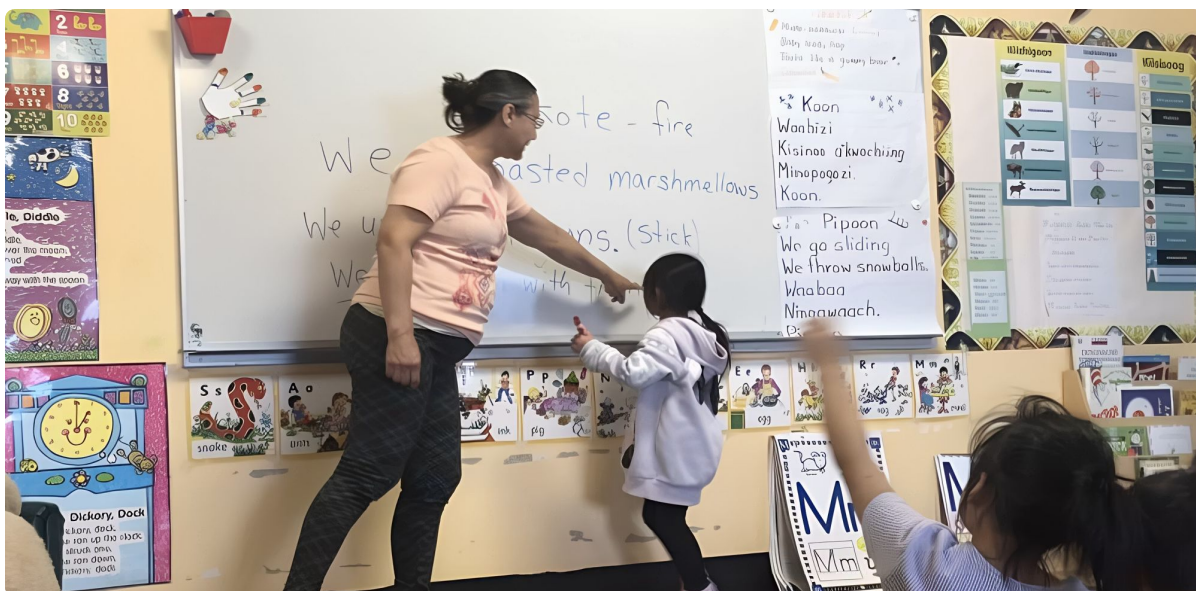
Anishinaabemowin Terminology and Meaning

Term	Meaning
okaatak	carrots
koon	snow
ishkote	fire
kisinaa	It's cold



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Nogèe News!

Oral Language Through Media Interviews



Context

Nogèe News took place on the traditional lands of the Yellowknife Dene First Nation and involved two teachers, including the school's Wìlìdeh Yati teacher; a Grade 5 class of 22 students (7–8 of whom identified as Indigenous); and a local media expert from *Cabin Radio*. As part of the project, students also toured the local CBC North News station. The Wìlìdeh Yati teacher supported the project by working with students for 30 minutes once a week.



Objectives

- To foster confidence with speaking in Wìlìdeh Yati and English
- To increase student engagement
- To develop students' writing skills



What They Did

- Invited local media experts and collaborated with the school's Wìlìdeh Yati teacher to teach the Newscast genre in both Wìlìdeh Yati and English.
- Coordinated several in-class sessions led by the local media expert, who provided guidance, engaged students in improvisation activities, and modelled how to ask open-ended interview questions.
- Facilitated a whole-class brainstorming and guided writing session to identify "must haves" for their written media interview scripts, including:
 - Greeting the audience
 - Providing a land acknowledgment
 - Introducing themselves
 - Sharing how they feel

- Commented on the weather
- Presented interview questions relevant to specific topic/themes (e.g., conversations about a fish scale art project students engaged in previously)
- Concluded with acknowledgments and thanking the audience for tuning in
- Integrated voice-recording buttons into media interviews, allowing students to listen to, speak along with, and gradually use Wìlìdeh Yati words and phrases independently (e.g., weather, animals, emotions)
- Guided students in practicing and rehearsing their scripts prior to video recording
- Co-created weekly media scripts with students, drawing on program activities such as Indigenous land-based learning to provide meaningful, hands-on experiences



Outcomes

Fostering Confidence in Speaking Wìlìdeh Yati and English

At the beginning of the year, many students approached speaking aloud with caution, particularly when using Wìlìdeh Yati. Students often spoke quietly, relied on scripts, or used recorded language buttons to support pronunciation as they became familiar with new sounds and words. These strategies reflected thoughtful engagement as students built comfort with speaking in both Wìlìdeh Yati and English.

Over time, regular opportunities to practice, rehearse, and participate in bilingual newscast activities supported students in developing greater ease and assurance when speaking. Students began to use Wìlìdeh Yati and English more naturally and fluidly, showing increased willingness to share their ideas, engage in bilingual conversations, and speak more audibly during interviews.

This growing confidence was also reflected in students' body language and interactions. Early on, many students appeared reserved, with quieter voices and limited eye contact. With continued practice, their voices grew stronger, their posture more open, and their participation more active. Students gradually relied less on scripts and language buttons, choosing instead to speak more independently and interact conversationally across both languages. One group of students, in particular, expressed pride in their progress and enthusiasm for participating. They invited classmates who were still developing confidence to practice with them, offering encouragement and peer support that helped foster a supportive environment for speaking Wìlìdeh Yati and English.

Increasing Student Engagement

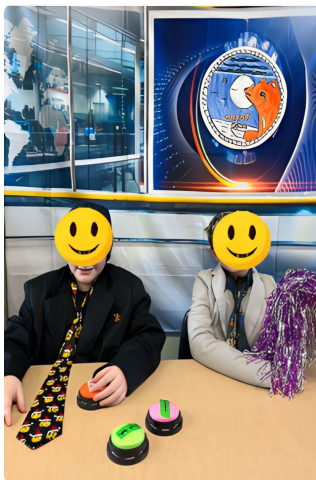
Student engagement increased steadily throughout the project as students were invited to participate in ways that felt supportive and flexible. While all students practiced the interview process and language components, there was no expectation that they be recorded or perform in a formal “news reporter” role. This approach encouraged participation by allowing students to engage at their own pace and comfort level.

Early in the project, a small group of students demonstrated courage by volunteering to practice and try unfamiliar Willideh Yati words, even before feeling fully confident. Their willingness to participate helped create momentum across the class. As peers observed these efforts, more students began to join in, practice aloud, and take risks with language. The classroom was a non-judgmental and supportive learning environment, where students felt encouraged to try their best without fear of making mistakes.

As students’ engagement deepened, peer support became a central feature of the learning process. Students who grew more fluent and confident

naturally supported classmates who were still developing their pronunciation, offering guidance in respectful and encouraging ways. This peer-to-peer learning reflected a full circle of shared responsibility—moving from the language teacher supporting the classroom teacher, to the teacher supporting students, and ultimately to students supporting one another. These interactions were especially evident during brainstorming sessions and partner practice, where quiet, affirming exchanges emerged organically (e.g., “You did a great job with that word!”).

While the project was initially heavily supported through teacher facilitation and encouragement, student engagement increasingly became self-directed. By the end of the project, students were independently creating scripts, developing interview questions, and practicing collaboratively with minimal adult guidance. The sustained engagement, peer collaboration, and growing independence demonstrated students’ strong investment in the project and their shared commitment to learning and using language together.



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Developing Writing Skills

Students demonstrated meaningful growth in their writing skills as classroom tasks evolved from highly supported interview scripts to more complex, layered, and dialogue-based writing. Early in the project, writing focused on short, structured scripts, with the teacher and students co-creating interview questions. These early writing experiences focused on how to frame questions, sequence them thoughtfully, and adapt them based on the interview context, whether speaking with classmates or special guests from the school community.

This initial structure provided a strong foundation for learning how to craft open-ended questions and consider appropriate follow-up prompts. While scripts were written in advance, students were also encouraged to think flexibly and respond in the moment, supporting the development of both written and oral communication skills. The early reliance on scripted questions helped students build comfort and confidence with the writing process, particularly around organizing ideas and

anticipating conversational flow.

As students participated in more interviews and recording sessions, their writing became increasingly detailed and intentional. Rather than producing fully scripted texts, students used their written questions as a starting point for richer, more dynamic exchanges. They demonstrated growing ability to elaborate, ask follow-up questions based on what they heard, and co-construct dialogue in ways that felt natural and conversational. This shift reflected deeper thinking, creativity, and a stronger understanding of how written prompts can guide meaningful interaction.

By the end of the project, students were independently generating interview questions, refining scripts, and using their writing as a flexible tool to support dialogue-based storytelling. Their work showed increased clarity, depth, and purpose, highlighting how structured writing experiences can support confidence, adaptability, and authentic communication.



Wiilideh Yati Terminology and Meaning

Term	Meaning
k'omqòdqò hoizì	Good morning
dzetani hoizì	Good afternoon
dànet'e?	How are you?
Dıdzè k'e edza.	It is cold
Dıdzè k'e zah at'l.	It is snowing
mahsi cho	Thank you
nets'aʔja sòò	Goodbye
nezì	Good
nezìle	Not good



Playing with Questions and Answers in Anishinaabemowin

Context

This research was conducted on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, with a group of six Anishinaabek students in Grades 1 through 3.



Objectives

- To support children's learning of question-and-answer forms in Anishinaabemowin through puppet play and everyday classroom interactions



What They Did

- The classroom teacher recorded student-generated questions—focused on four commonly used forms (What do you have? What are you doing? Where are you going? What's the matter with you?)—on coloured recording buttons.
- The classroom teacher collaborated with the Anishinaabemowin teacher to translate students' English responses into Anishinaabemowin.
- The classroom teacher held 15-minute practice sessions 2–3 times per week, during which:
 - a recorded question button was played.
 - students listened to the Anishinaabemowin translation and practiced repeating both the questions and answers together
- Students selected an animal puppet and either partnered with a peer or took on both roles to ask and respond to questions.
- The classroom teacher modelled simple script structures for students.
- The classroom teacher supported students in co-writing scripts in English first, followed by Anishinaabemowin translation.

- The classroom teacher guided students as they rehearsed their scripts using puppets.
- The classroom teacher facilitated opportunities for students to share their puppet performances with parents.



Outcomes

Confident Use of Questions and Answers

Students demonstrated strong and growing confidence in using Anishinaabemowin questions and corresponding responses fluently, resulting in exchanges that felt natural, expressive, and conversational. Students were particularly drawn to the question “*What’s the matter with you?*”, which they found humorous and engaging; this enjoyment encouraged repeated use and supported confident participation. Their comfort with these question-answer structures extended beyond planned activities, indicating internalization rather than memorization.

This confidence was further evident when a student independently integrated Anishinaabemowin vocabulary into an English-language reading task, substituting familiar words seamlessly and accurately. His use of *gigoonh* (fish) and *gigoonh-k* (fishing) demonstrated an emerging understanding of how meaning shifts through word endings and actions. Such moments reflected students’ growing bilingual fluency and willingness to draw on Anishinaabemowin knowledge across literacy contexts.



Awareness and Self-Monitoring

Students demonstrated increasing awareness of their language use and a strong ability to monitor and adjust their speech in real time. When navigating similar-sounding question forms (e.g., *Aapiish ezhaayin?* and *Aaniish ezhiyaayin?*), students frequently paused, reflected, and self-corrected before continuing. These moments highlighted careful attention to meaning, pronunciation, and communicative intent.

Students effectively used available language supports, such as colour-coded question buttons, to confirm accuracy. Even when engaging playfully with humorous questions like “*What’s the matter with you?*”, students demonstrated thoughtful decision-making and control over language choice. This self-monitoring reflected developing metalinguistic awareness and growing confidence in learning and using oral language..

Transfer to Everyday Classroom Interactions

Students successfully transferred their Anishinaabemowin learning beyond structured practice sessions into everyday classroom interactions. They increasingly and naturally incorporated familiar questions and vocabulary during science, math, and play-based activities, moving fluidly between English and Anishinaabemowin to support meaning-making. Animal puppets served as effective catalysts for this transfer, allowing students to use greetings, questions, and expressions of need (e.g., *Boozhoo Makwa*, *Aaniish ezhiyaayin?*, *Nbakade*) in engaging and socially meaningful ways.

Transfer was also evident beyond the classroom. One parent shared that her children used Anishinaabemowin questions and expressions while playing together at home, despite the parent not being fluent herself. This demonstrates that students viewed the language as functional and relevant beyond school settings. Overall, students’ increasing use of Anishinaabemowin across classroom subjects and home contexts reflects successful integration of the language into their daily communicative practices.



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Anishinaabemowin Terminology and Meaning

Term	Meaning
Makwa	Bear
Waagosh	Fox
Migizi	Eagle
Mooz	Moose
Nimosh	Dog
Amik	Beaver
Ma'iingan	Wolf
Gigoonhke / Gigoonh	Fishing / Fish
Aaniish ezhiyaayin?	How do you feel?
Aapiish ezhaayin?	Where are you going?
Aaniish enakiyyin?	What are you doing?
Aaniish ezhwebziyin?	What's the matter with you?
Wenesh eyaaman?	What do you have?
Bakade	Hungry
Boozhoo	Hello

Nanabush Through Grade 5 Anishinaabek Students' Eyes

Context

Nanabush through Grade 5 Anishinaabek Students' Eyes took place Northern Ontario, with a group of 20 Grade 5 students who identify as Anishinaabek.

Nanabush (also known as Nanaboozhoo) is a central figure in Anishinaabek storytelling. He is often described as a trickster, teacher, and transformer. Stories of Nanabush are used to teach values, relationships, and ways of being. The Nanabush legends used in the classroom were retold and illustrated by Daphne Odjig, an artist, grounding the work in local knowledge and Indigenous authorship.



Objectives

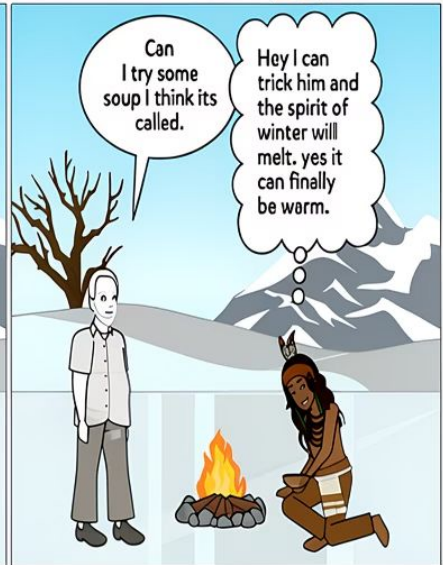
- To explore writing motivation and personal investment when students engaged with cultural stories and themes about Nanabush



What They Did

- **Story introduction:** The teacher read a Nanabush story about the Spirit of Winter to the students.
- **Identity discussion:** The teacher facilitated a class conversation about how students see themselves as Anishinaabek.
- **Story structure work:** The teacher collaboratively developed a story arc of the Nanabush tale with the students.
- **Digital creation:** The teacher guided students in creating graphic texts of the story using [Pixton](#)® software.
- **Sharing & presentation:** Students presented their completed graphic texts to the class.

nonobush and the spirit of winter.





Outcomes

Increased student motivation and engagement

Students demonstrated excitement and pride in creating and sharing their dialogue-based stories. One student who typically struggled to sustain focus during writing tasks showed notable engagement and perseverance throughout the activity. The classroom environment was lively and collaborative, with laughter and curiosity sparked by peers' creative portrayals of Nanabush—such as depicting the character as a raccoon or with dreadlocks.

These choices led to rich peer interactions,

including moments where students clarified cultural or narrative interpretations for one another.

Students proudly shared their progress and continued to develop an ongoing relationship with Nanabush across multiple legends, including the creation of their own stories. A key moment of learning occurred when students began naming and using elements of a “story arc” spontaneously during unstructured play, indicating a deep internalization of narrative concepts.

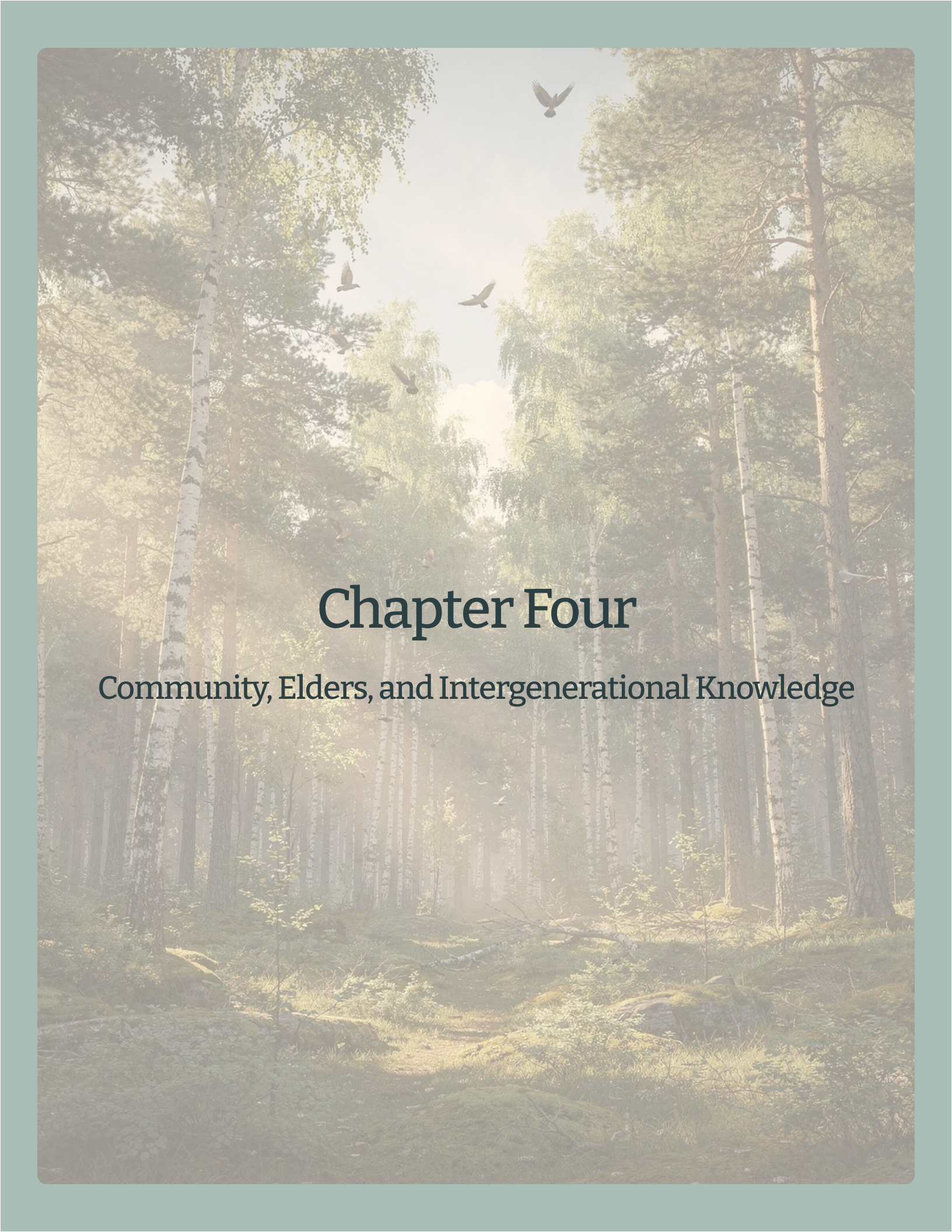
Personal Connection through Storytelling

While students' graphic texts closely followed traditional Nanabush legends, students consistently identified more strongly with Nanabush than with the Spirit of Winter. Nanabush was represented as humorous, humble, and playful—often portrayed as a trickster with teenage-like qualities that mirrored

students' own personalities. For example, students showed Nanabush asking the Spirit of Winter for help, emphasizing humility and relationality. In contrast, the Spirit of Winter was depicted as distant and powerful, illustrated using white or blue tones and shown ascending or sinking into the ground after eating soup, reinforcing its contrasting role in the narrative.

References

Odjig, D. (2009). *Nanabush and the spirit of winter*. Theytus Books.

A misty forest scene with tall trees and birds flying in the sky. The image has a soft, ethereal quality with a light blue and green color palette. The text is centered over the image.

Chapter Four

Community, Elders, and Intergenerational Knowledge

Creating Community Minded Leaders

Deepening Understanding of the Local Indigenous Perspective

Context

Creating Community-Minded Leaders took place in northern Alberta, on the traditional meeting grounds of the Cree and Dene, Treaty 8 Territory. The project involved 18 students in Grades 9, 10, and 12 enrolled in a leadership and mentorship class. The project was supported by two Elders and two additional community collaborators (a Project Peace Facilitator and an Indigenous Liaison) who guided and advised on land-based learning opportunities. Four to five students identified as Indigenous. Most students had limited prior experience with Indigenous cultural practices or land-based learning, making this project an important opportunity to engage directly with community knowledge, culture, and leadership development.



Objectives

- To foster students' understanding of Indigenous culture, practices, and connection with the land as a means to strengthen relationships with the community and support their growth as leaders.



What They Did

- The teacher consulted with the school-based Indigenous education contact and the school division's Indigenous coordinator to plan opportunities for land-based and culturally grounded learning.
- The two Elders provided cultural knowledge, teachings, and guidance on Indigenous practices, ceremonies, and land-based learning.
- The Project Peace Facilitator and Indigenous Liaison advised on planning, logistics, and connection to community resources.

- Together, the adults organized and facilitated students' participation in sequential activities, including
 - Collecting and bundling sage in the Hills to provide a sustainable supply for school smudging ceremonies.
 - Creating tobacco ties for the *Sisters in Spirit Walk*.
 - Participating in Remembrance Day ceremonies for the Indigenous community.
 - Visiting the on-site White Buffalo Lodge to engage with traditional Indigenous practices and teachings.
- The teacher guided reflection and discussion, prompting students to consider how these experiences shaped their understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and influenced their growth as leaders.
- Throughout, the adults emphasized mindfulness, ethical engagement with the land, and respectful interaction with cultural knowledge.



Outcomes

Respect for Indigenous Practices and the Land

Students demonstrated care, mindfulness, and responsibility during all land-based activities. For example, when harvesting sage in the Hills, they carefully cut stems rather than pulling from the roots, showing awareness of sustainable practices. Students also reflected on the importance of being kind to the earth and

respecting traditional ceremonies, demonstrating thoughtful engagement with both the land and Indigenous traditions. Students were highly attentive to guidance from Elders and collaborators, taking the time to slow down, consider each step, and participate mindfully in each activity.



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Cultural Learning Community Values

Students developed a deep appreciation for Indigenous cultural practices and the values embedded within them. While making tobacco ties and participating in ceremonies such as the *Sisters in Spirit Walk* or Remembrance Day events, students recognized how these practices foster connection, respect, and care within the

community. Students noticed cultural teachings about food practices and hunting, and how life has changed over time, which helped them understand that culture is relational, collaborative, and guides community life. Through hands-on engagement, students connected the practices to community values and traditions.

Identity and Knowledge Sharing

Students explored personal connections to Indigenous ways of knowing and reflected on their own identities in relation to these teachings. Students shared stories and reflections during class discussions, as well as taking insights home to share with family members, supporting

intergenerational understanding. Students connected what they learned from Elders and land-based activities to their own experiences, showing that they could actively apply knowledge in meaningful ways and consider how it could be shared respectfully.

Leadership and Personal Growth

Students demonstrated growth in leadership, collaboration, and confidence throughout the project. Students who were initially shy became more willing to speak up, contribute ideas, and support their peers. By engaging in hands-on activities and group reflections, students

developed stronger communication skills and considered diverse perspectives when planning or participating in community-based tasks. Overall, the experiences encouraged students to work collaboratively, build confidence, and practice leadership skills in authentic, culturally grounded contexts.



Back in the Day

What Kookoo and D. Did When They Were Young

Context

Back in the Day took place in an early learning centre in Northern Ontario with two Elders of their community.



Objectives

- To find out what older relatives did when they were young and incorporate those insights into early childhood education programming.



What They Did

- Conducted interviews with older relatives to gather firsthand accounts of childhood play and outdoor experiences based on these questions:
 - What type of toys or games did you play with in nature as a child?
 - What rules or boundaries did you have when you played? Why?
 - What basic commands should we teach children when outdoors?
 - What would you teach children about the outdoors, and at what age?
- Recorded the interviews and then listened to them many times to identify themes relevant to outdoor learning, socialization, and traditional skills.
- Organized follow-up opportunities for students to experiment with activities inspired by interview insights, such as outdoor play, sensory exploration, and making toys from natural materials.



What They Learned

Group Games and Social Learning

Elders shared how children of different ages participated together in group games, highlighting a natural process of social learning. Older children and teens often set the rules, while younger children observed and learned through active participation. Games such as hide-and-seek, playing with marbles, and constructing a swing over the water fostered cooperation and skill-

sharing. Children had fun in these activities and developed social understanding and collaborative problem-solving skills. Elders recalled that children were excited about negotiating rules with older peers and displayed satisfaction after successfully following instructions. These interactions provided early lessons in leadership, teamwork, and patience.

Relationships to Nature and Learning Traditional Skills

Through the stories shared, it became clear that children in earlier generations developed deep, enduring connections with the natural world from a young age. Everyday activities—swimming in rivers, exploring forests and fields, and engaging with elements like grass, berries, and water—offered rich opportunities for learning and discovery. Children used all their senses—observing, listening, touching, and exploring—fostering a profound understanding and intimate awareness of the natural environment. Elders reflected on the joy of discovering hidden natural

spots, learning which berries were safe to eat, and the excitement of watching wildlife. Exploration was both playful and educational.

Activities such as fishing with nets, tracking wildlife, and attending to seasonal patterns allowed children to gain both practical abilities and a deeper understanding of the natural world. Elders shared memories of teaching a child to cast a net or identify animal tracks, noting how these moments strengthened intergenerational bonds and created lasting learning experiences.

Making Toys from Environmental Materials

Elders' stories revealed that children often had limited access to manufactured toys, so they crafted playthings from materials found in their surroundings. In this way, children showed resourcefulness, creativity and a deep connection

to the natural world. One Elder remembered making small boats from bark or dolls from moss, emphasizing how such activities encouraged imagination, collaboration, and innovation among peers.

Learning Traditional Values

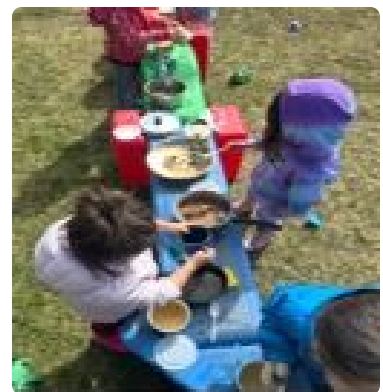
The project highlighted how cultural norms and values were passed down to children through daily life and social interactions. From an early age, children learned to respect others, listen attentively to Elders, and honor stories, legends,

and traditions. Elders' stories illustrated moments when children practiced these values, such as patiently listening to a legend before joining a game, demonstrating the integration of moral lessons into daily life.



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The Land as Our Playground

Exploring Past Indigenous Play and Parenting Practices in Northern Canadian Communities

Context

The Land is Our Playground took place in an Early Childhood Education (ECE) certificate and Diploma Program in Northern Canada as part of a Planning for Play course.



Objectives

- To learn about parenting practices and play of eight Dene Elders when they were children and use the knowledge to plan a community event.



What They Did

1. Developed interview questions and invited Elders to participate

- The instructor and interns developed the following set of questions to gather information about Elders' parenting practices involving play and about their memories of play as children.
 - Please describe play activities that you remember or that you see when at home or in your community.
 - What do you think you learned through play at home or in the community? What benefits can you see for children who participate in play activities in their communities?
 - What legends and stories affected the way you played?
 - What do you feel you learned from parenting practices in your home or community? What were some key values or teachings emphasized when raising children?
- Interns conducted and recorded interviews using [Otter.ai](#) and other transcription tools.

2. Analyzed the data

- Transcribed interviews and identified themes related to relationships with land, community, spirituality, and traditional skills.
- These themes directly informed the design and structure of the community event, ensuring that activities reflected Elders' teachings about land-based play, storytelling, and relational ways of learning.

3. Organized a *Traditional Play in Parenting Family Event* to encourage community connections (based on interview themes)

At the event, interns:

- Facilitated traditional learning: fish scaling and fish scale art, using real fish (e.g., white fish and trout) as well as cooking traditional foods (e.g., moose stew and bannock).
- Shared Dene legends promoting safety, respect for the land and animals.
- Introduced Indigenous games and created posters with Wilíideh words for families to take home to promote Indigenous language, cultural traditions, and intergenerational learning.
- Developed a list of parenting practices/styles and shared them using a QR code.



What They Learned

Play fostered identity and well-being

Elders described play as essential to children's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, contributing to improved sleep, overall health, and a strong sense of self. Interns reflected that Elders' vivid and detailed childhood memories were

closely connected to being highly active and deeply engaged in play experiences, highlighting how these experiences contribute to a lasting sense of identity and personal meaning over time.



Respect, connection, and spirituality were inseparable

Play served as a foundation for learning cooperation, mutual respect, and relational understanding between individuals, as well as with the natural world, including animals, water, and the land. A deep respect for the land was embedded within all interactions. Elders emphasized that being on the land required following specific protocols and demonstrating respect, guided by Dene laws such as sharing what one has and showing care and love for

others. Spirituality was interwoven into everyday life and closely tied to these practices, reinforcing values of generosity, responsibility, and interconnectedness within the community.

Child-rearing in Elders' communities is a shared responsibility among parents, Elders, siblings, and extended family members. Storytelling was identified as a key way Elders taught and reinforced cultural values of respect, relationships, and spiritual responsibilities.

Play was land-based and required children's resourcefulness

Play experiences were grounded in the natural environment and often involved the use of handmade or natural materials, including activities connected to water, land, and traditional skills such as hunting. Children were given considerable freedom and responsibility, with

minimal adult intervention, allowing them to learn through experience, natural consequences, and community-guided discipline. Traditional skills were developed through play as children, while also strengthening skills such as observation, listening, and attentiveness through participation in shared experiences.



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