

Indigenous Knowledge, Young Adult Literature, and Teacher Education: Literature as Stories for Education Practice

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Abstract. This paper explores how Indigenous Young Adult Literature (IYAL), offers teacher candidates (TCs) spaces for examining crucial ideas regarding Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. The paper documents the making and re-making of a required course on American Indian and diverse communities for teacher candidates and Masters of Education students in a teacher education program. Using IYAL as a curricular approach with TCs in education programs is one step toward developing anti-oppressive education practices that work to understand marginalized peoples while also enacting pedagogies “that work against the privileging of certain groups, the normalizing of certain identities, and that make visible these processes” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 35). By incorporating Indigenous knowledge as story (Rice, 2020), IYAL can be a tool for developing nuanced understandings of Indigenous youth, Indigenous Peoples and communities. Supporting TCs to better attend to the needs of Indigenous youth through IYAL allows for exploring the complexity of youth, identity, and culture of Indigenous Peoples. IYAL can feed the spirits of Indigenous youth in schools, a place that has historically been hostile, violent, and deadly to them. The paper explores the transformation of this course based on using IYAL as focal texts, and offers guiding principles to educators, librarians, and others who provide access to texts for learners, to support appropriate text selection to teach and learn about Indigenous Peoples’ experiences.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the ways in which Indigenous young adult literature (IYAL) can provide teacher candidates (TCs) with spaces for examining Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. Using IYAL as a pedagogical approach for TCs in education programs is one step in developing anti-oppressive educators who work to understand marginalized communities and enact transformative pedagogies. The use of IYAL serves as a mechanism to address racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression, to challenge “the privileging of certain groups, the normalizing of certain identities, and that make visible these processes” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 35) with Indigenous Peoples as a primary focus. Utilizing IYAL effectively is one way to avoid the pitfalls of curricula that maintain us/them and self/other dichotomies, and dismiss systemic and structural

aspects of oppression, while at the same time offering a point of engagement that challenges the so-called neutrality of texts (Reese, 2017). At the same time, focusing on texts with TCs can also illuminate harmful and problematic narratives about Indigenous Peoples, through critical literacy approaches (Reese, 2018; 2013) to consider whose story is heard, not heard, and to consider the why of these outcomes. Engaging IYAL in teacher preparation courses can open spaces for examining of Indigenous identity, histories, cultures, and worldviews, and can be a means of resisting the normalcy of settler-colonial structures and logic (Horner et al., 2021; King, 2012). Using IYAL as part of an anti-oppressive curriculum could help move toward desire-centered work with Indigenous Peoples, to focus on “understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives” (Tuck, 2009, p. 416).

This article will explore the use of IYAL in one teacher education course, a course developed in response to state legislative mandates for teacher preparation. After situating myself through a positionality statement, I will describe the context of the course through story, blended with a theoretical framework, highlighting implications for Indigeneity across Turtle Island (*North America*). This is followed by a conceptual framework which explores the use of IYAL. The paper will offer a set of developing principles for the use of IYAL for use with TCs, which can translate to their future work with K-12 students. This paper touches upon five components and describes their significance to Indigeneity. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion and next steps for future research and exploration.

POSITIONALITY

Before shifting to the remainder of this article, I want to share who I am and how my identity influenced my relationship with this article and its ideas. I present my positionality with respect to my academic foremothers and forefathers, who emphasized the need to name multiple identities as part of a critical lens (see Reyes, 2020). Naming personal subjectivities and positionalities helps individuals resist the myth of objectivity to locate research and scholarship connected to personal relationships and communities. Scholars of race and culture must address their positionality to identify how their social identities have influenced and been influenced by interactions with power and privilege.

My identity as a member of the Pascua Yaqui Indian Tribe of Arizona and Chicano person has had a direct role in how I live, teach, and learn. I was born and raised in a place colonially referred to as Arizona, and now live in a place colonially known as Vancouver, British Columbia.

As a teacher educator, I work to develop curricular and pedagogical experiences for future teachers to support their awareness of and capacity to engage concepts central to Indigenous Peoples experiences. My work includes helping teachers develop conceptual and practical tools for anti-oppressive education to open spaces of celebration of Indigenous ways of survivance (Vizenor, 2008) and resistance to settler-colonial logic (Powell, 2002) to unsettle the “epistemological hegemony” (Brant-Birioukov, 2021, p. 254) practiced in education. As an Indigenous person, I hold stories and storytelling as prominent concepts in my epistemological and ontological frames of reference. Like Brayboy (2005), I contend that stories and theories are not mutually exclusive concepts. I practice with the belief that, in teacher education, stories, both oral and text format, can be an effective means of communicating crucial knowledge and conceptual understanding.

THE CONTEXT OF THE COURSE

The context of the course described here is essential for understanding the texts and selection process described below. Although it might be assumed that discussions of IYAL can or should occur only in the space of English education classrooms, this paper argues for an expansion of their use, in two ways: first, in support of current TCs, many of whom have little or no knowledge of Indigenous Peoples’ lived experiences. At the same time, use of IYAL can help TCs consider their future work as educators, and explore crucial questions about young people, and how they might work in education settings with them (e.g., “how might reading about Apple’s life experience impact your engagement with her as a teacher?” and other hypotheticals).

The class described in this paper is a required course for all education majors with a broad title related to diversity and American Indian Peoples. The course standards, codified by state legislation and enacted by teacher certification bodies, pedagogical elements (i.e., “best practices” for Indigenous students) along with several specific content area standards related to Indigeneity (i.e., knowledge of local Indigenous Peoples’ histories, cultures, and languages). The TCs, regardless of the curricula they planned to teach, were required to take the course, and were expected to leave with a working knowledge of best practices for engaging Indigenous students in their classrooms. The emphasis of Indigeneity should be noted; the teacher preparation program referenced here requires TCs to pass this course as a function of state licensing of teachers, in a state with a large Indigenous population and a rich history of Indigenous activism, including some of the first and continuously active American Indian Movement and Red Power chapters. This activism led to crucial gains for Indigenous Peoples in the state, including a binding Memorandum of

Understanding with the Superintendent of the largest school district in the state, and mandated regular meetings with Indigenous community members to continuously address the needs of Indigenous students (Minneapolis Public Schools, n.d.). State legislation was also crucial given the demographic realities of the state, which, despite a large percentage of Indigenous, black, and people of color in schools reported less than 6% teachers of color population at the time of this writing (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2023). Thus, the mandates of state legislation sought to prepare a largely non-Indigenous teacher population to engage with Indigenous topics in a state with a high Indigenous student population.

WORKING TOWARDS TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Although the principles described here informed curriculum development for a course in a Midwest university, the principles also have application for curriculum development in Canada, particularly in relation to truth and reconciliation in British Columbia. The 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC): Calls to Action is an essential guide for developing curricular and pedagogical approaches related to Indigenous Peoples in Canada and can serve as a powerful model for educational transformation across Turtle Island (North America). The report presents key areas for developing the educational practices and approaches necessary to address the legacy of residential school trauma in Canada, including education policy and practice. Germane to this discussion is Call to Action Section 62, Subsection ii, which indicates:

The federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to: provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms. (TRC, 2015, p. 7, emphasis added)

The Calls to Action indicate that postsecondary education institutions are crucial learning sites for the truth about Indigenous Peoples and should support education for reconciliation. The report suggests approaches that TCs can use to engage with Indigenous knowledge in accessible and engaging ways for students and in their practices. However, there are important caveats as educators consider engaging with texts, stories, and histories.

As educators work to develop the skills and capacities for working with diverse student populations, it is important to acknowledge two elements impacting the context of this course, and indeed, in many teacher education spaces: first, that a vast majority of TCs are the white descendants

of settler colonizers, the legacy of the painful history many IYAL texts address. Secondly, despite best intentions and beliefs about equality, many educators often do not see the need for engaging the work of diversifying materials for students. As such, educators are frequently ill-equipped to address topics about Indigenous Peoples. These statements are not designed to blame or shame, but to state a simple truth: non-indigenous educators frequently lack the knowledge necessary to engage Indigenous topics in responsible and respectful ways and frequently deny the need to engage these topics at all. This is not surprising to Indigenous scholars and educators, who frequently identify racism and settler colonialism as a significant hurdle in education (Kendi & Stone, 2023) and seek to identify the settler colonial water that all education swims in (Reese, 2019, 2018, 2017).

LEARNING FROM STORY: READING IN THE CLASSROOM

One day, I was leaving a classroom where I had just finished teaching an elementary education methods course. It was near the middle of the semester, and several TCs were anxiously moving around, preparing for, or finishing their midterm exams. I noticed a group of students filing out of the classroom next to mine, who looked both excited and exhausted. Four TCs quickly gathered in a circle and began whispering and giggling. I walked by the group, curious but not wanting to pry.

One of the TCs whispered, perhaps more loudly than she intended, “I did it! And I didn’t even read a single page!” The others nodded and laughed in agreement. I shook my head and passed them into the hallway, walking to my office and wondering how to make sense of what I had just heard. I felt the impulse to judge and critique, for the seeming lack of care and concern for their education. However, I battled this impulse with my knowledge of student-centered and asset-based philosophy of young people, students, and their abilities. I immediately reflected on my own classes: How were TCs navigating and negotiating the texts I had assigned in my classes?

As I struggled to reconcile the positive and negative framings I was experiencing, I questioned the pedagogical and curricular approaches that may have caused that group to disengage from their texts. I wondered about the conditions in place that could cause young people to not engage with their texts. The idea of asking TCs to force themselves to engage in ways ineffective for them seemed oppressive and unhealthy to me, and I also considered the need of TCs to engage in reading challenging, sometimes dense texts.

The struggle over texts, text assignments, and student engagement continued until I spoke with a colleague from the American Indian Student Office of a local school district. While discussing education, Indigenous students, and teaching within predominantly White institutions, she

recommended a book for me to read. She had fallen in love with it, but also issued a warning: It would cause powerful emotions! I immediately purchased the recommended book, The Marrow Thieves (Dimaline, 2017), and, as my colleague predicted, I responded powerfully. After reading the book and after I finished crying and laughing uncontrollably for 10 minutes straight, my first thought was, “Every future educator I teach needs to read this.” I made the book the anchor for carefully curating texts and articulating the critical elements of theory for TCs. The focal point of my curriculum was the opportunity to examine story (Archibald, 2008; Rice, 2020) as a theory (Brayboy, 2005) to inform and develop content knowledge of Indigenous Peoples. My goal was a hope and prayer: that TCs would leave my classroom exclaiming, “I did it! And I read every single page!”

Early iterations of the course described here relied heavily on nonfiction texts, with an emphasis on informational and data driven explanations. Although the nonfiction texts were useful for presenting factual, technical information about Indigenous Peoples, TCs struggled to engage with the course materials. In many ways, these texts exemplified their own colonial trappings (not unlike the colonial trappings of writing this article) the focus on “facts” and “knowledge” obtainable only through nonfiction texts, without acknowledging that story is equally capable—and often more effective—at communicating information and developing understanding. To help TCs rethink these assumptions, the course was revised, with IYAL becoming the focal medium of the course, creating a shift towards centering story, and a “desire-centered” (Tuck, 2009) approach, emanating from texts that included Indigenous Peoples imaginings about the future, and about celebration of survivance. Through the selected texts, TCs were introduced to story to speak against colonial logic (King, 2012; Reese, 2008) and White supremacist projections by using texts that showed historic, contemporary, and future depictions of Indigenous characters.

Key to the process of reimagining this course for TCs was a shift from nonfiction-based texts. Although the texts themselves are useful and informative their central focus proved to detract from students' learning and engagement. Students struggled with making meaning of these texts, particularly when many had little to no exposure to Indigenous Peoples. Shifting the course to emphasizing IYAL proved to be a more effective experience in terms of discussion, interest, and deeper exploration of the concepts. TCs reported deeper engagement with text, and an ability to explore more complex topics with greater connection and empathy (Muñoz, 2022a).

Determining what to include in a course's text offerings is a constant balancing act between the needs of the standards and the needs of students. Educators have the unique opportunity to

engage students in learning with multiple forms of curriculum and can creatively employ many approaches, including those that draw on students' capacities, interests, and funds of knowledge (González et al, 2006). Diverse approaches within the curriculum must include teaching skills and competencies that TCs need to support their future work in classrooms while also supporting TCs to imagine other ways of teaching and learning. Those working with TCs have a responsibility to demonstrate the kinds of practices we want TCs to emulate—including teaching practices that incorporate students' interests, curiosities, and materials they are interested in.

The use of IYAL focal texts in this course was the result of a concern for TC's well-being in the classroom: a concern for teaching and acting as kin, and responding to their stress and disengagement with the nonfiction texts of the course. Along with reconsidering texts used, the course shifted to incorporate teaching that centered communication, relationship, well-being, and diverse ways of being, to help TCs imagine different approaches to knowledge transmission. This perspective raises important tensions between centering Indigenous history, language, and culture, particularly considering the Western, White, European epistemologies frequently used to frame learning as 'mastery of standards.' Indigenous standpoints often focus on holistic visions of teaching and learning that provide necessary skills and capabilities, while focusing on the health and well-being of learners. Health and well-being are functions of relationships and kinship (Justice, 2018) that are not codified in standards; nevertheless, they are crucial for student development, and often central to Indigenous students' success in schools (Battiste, 2013; Sabzalian, 2019). Given the current context of student's experiences, the attention to emotional well-being needs to be a greater focus for teacher education programs, and one aligned to Indigenous views of holistic wellbeing and care of relatives and kin.

LEARNING FROM STORY: INDIGENEITY IS POST-APOCALYPSE

*In March of 2020 just months before the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent quarantines that ended all public events, Cherie Dimaline, author of *The Marrow Thieves*, gave a public talk where she recounted how she came to write her novel. She joked that her inspiration came from being “peer pressured” into “writing an apocalypse story from an Indigenous perspective” (Dimaline, 2020). Dimaline described her writing process in identifying an “apocalypse” and called it “a state of affairs where people could no longer live the way they were accustomed to living.” After establishing this definition, Dimaline came to a clear conclusion: writing an apocalypse story from an Indigenous perspective would not really be fiction, because Indigenous peoples have already*

experienced an apocalypse. The apocalypse of settler colonization had rendered a post-apocalyptic world for Indigenous Peoples. Far removed from the fantasy of hypothetical survival in a post-apocalypse universe of zombies, or brutal survival competitions for scarce resources, Dimaline noted that, for Indigenous Peoples, the apocalypse had come, and stayed. Which led to another intriguing question: when we fantasize about “post-apocalypse,” we must ask: apocalypse for who?

*As she described more of the writing process for *The Marrow Thieves*, Dimaline produced another intriguing idea, one that would shape the further development of the diversity and American Indian Peoples course. Differentiating between adult and young adult fiction, Dimaline described her admiration and joy in writing young adult literature, identifying the joy of young adult literature being a genre that “leads with the heart.” I was moved by Dimaline’s characterization of young adult literature as “leading with the heart” as it gave name to my experience of working with young people. I was delighted to hear an author voice a similar belief about young people, naming the need to consider where youth are, and where they are moving from; using literature that leads with the heart implies the need to engage curriculum that leads with the heart, I thought.*

Following Dimaline’s lead, the notion of engaging texts as story, to connect TCs to knowledge beyond that offered through nonfiction conventions, seemed logical, but also ideal. Not only could TCs gain insights into the worlds of diverse young peoples in the books they read, but they could apply this learning to future students in their classrooms. More broadly, educators can benefit from Dimaline’s reflection on authoring young adult literature. In reading story that leads with the heart, educators have the opportunity to consider their own standpoints relative to that expressed about young people in stories. What would it mean to consider young people as “leading with the heart,” and how might that consideration influence curricula and pedagogical practices?

CURRICULAR CONSTRUCTION: COURSE OVERVIEW AND ACTIVITIES

With the incorporation of IYAL as focal texts in the class, and standpoint as a guiding framework, the course proceeded with various activities and engagement points for TCs. Throughout each class meeting, TCs were challenged to engage with the stories presented in each text, to explore the standpoints articulated in each book (e.g. “what does *The Birchbark House* communicate about the meaning of childhood and what is its significance to the community?”) all while connecting each character’s experience to a schooling environment (e.g. “what can Apple’s new experiences with her community tell us about Indigenous youth?”). Throughout the discussions, TCs were invited to

reflect on the texts in multiple ways, with questions related to teaching and learning as anchor points throughout. Discussions in class were TC facilitated, with guiding questions provided by the instructor, with the freedom to direct conversations in the ways they found generative for them.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: STANDPOINT AND INDIGENOUS YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Central to the work of considering IYAL to transmit crucial knowledge and understanding to TCs are two assumptions: first, that story communicates valuable knowledge, and second, that written text can be accepted as a form of story. Indigenous scholars have argued for the significance of story as a vital medium of communication for information transmission (Archibald, 2008), to communicate critical cultural knowledge and awareness (Basso, 1996), and to build trusting relationships between members of a community (San Pedro and Kinloch, 2017). Indigenous Peoples outside of teacher education institutions, like knowledge keepers and elders, frequently tell story, teach story, and teach the protocols for sharing story, to maintain cultural knowledge amongst those learning culture and history. Frequently, “story” is conceptualized as oral communication, with in-person, direct communication being the primary mode of this knowledge transmission.

However, an expansion on the conception of story to include written text in tandem with oral storytelling is possible, and arguably, vital, to the continued transmission of story. Anishinaabe author and journalist Waubgeshig Rice (2020) notes the tension of oral storytelling traditions and text-based storytelling, as a participant in two careers which “rely on documentation as story validation” (Rice, 2020, paragraph 8). While working to maintain fidelity to his community’s conventions of storytelling, Rice describes a dilemma in the “collision of storytelling worlds” (Rice, 2020, paragraph 9) between oral and written conventions. This dilemma does not dissuade Rice from continuing to write while practicing elements of oral storytelling practice, such as committing narrative arcs to memory, and working to incorporate Anishinaabemowin (Anishinaabe language) into his novels and short stories. For Rice, the use of technology for writing should not dismiss it as a potential benefit to his community. Rice argues that “although they’re fictional novels...[his books] still become cultural reference points that can be more accessible than face-to-face storytelling” that “reinforce elements of Anishinaabe traditions and history” (Rice, 2020, paragraph 12-13). Building on Rice’s conception of dilemma of oral and written story, the course development for TCs assumes that IYAL can transmit vital ‘elements of...tradition and history’ that can support educators working with

Indigenous youth, in Indigenous communities, or in teaching about Indigeneity to non-Indigenous students.

For many Indigenous youth—and for many Indigenous adults like myself—story as text provides crucial insight and representations, as well as providing a bridge to culture when elders and knowledge keepers may not be accessible. The “cultural reference points” (Rice, 2020, paragraph 13) communicated by Indigenous authors provides important and affirming insights into “how to be [and]...how to be a good human” (Battiste, 2013, p. 99). Additionally, in the age of deep concerns about climate, the environment, and sustainability, *IYAL* reminds youth that being a good human is the responsibility to kinship with all beings. *IYAL* presents lessons for our connections to those around us, and to “respectful coexistence with our other-than-human relatives” (Justice, 2018, p. 39). In times before technology, much of this work would occur in family and community stories; today, there are multiple media we access to bring us these learnings. As Metis scholar Shannon Leddy noted, these new media “are our campfire stories, too” (Shannon Leddy, personal communication, May 2, 2022).

STANDPOINT

To help TCs explore the significance of *IYAL* to their understanding of Indigeneity, the course began with an overview of Walter and Andersen’s standpoint framework found in *Indigenous Statistics* (2013). Walter and Andersen argue for an examination of four key components in the process of developing a research methodology; this article extends the application of this framework, arguing that TCs can benefit from an exploration and unpacking of their own, personal standpoints. Briefly, Walter and Andersen’s framework states that all responses to any given stimuli emanate from four culturally informed components: one’s epistemology, ontology, axiology, and social position (Walter and Andersen, 2013, p. 45). To simplify the complex arguments of the philosophical concepts presented above, TCs were invited to define and explore their own “ways of knowing” (epistemologies) their “ways of being and doing” (ontologies) their “values and cares” (axiologies) and the various elements of their social identities (social positions). This approach was designed to help TCs explore a way of understanding their own perspectives and biases, and to consider how their own standpoints might impact their understanding and interpretations of the texts we examined. At the same time, the exploration into standpoint allowed the TCs to consider the standpoints of the characters in the texts, to determine salient differences and bonds of commonality between themselves and the characters in the focal texts.

In the context of this course, engaging Walter and Andersen's framework included a visualization exercise, where students read and made meaning of the key points of standpoint and discussed the ways that epistemology, ontology, axiology, and social position could be brought to their greater awareness. TCs were challenged to consider aspects of their standpoint that might be constructed through the influences of white supremacy, patriarchy, and hierarchical views towards Indigenous Peoples. This examination helped TCs to consider the role of oppressive structures in the shaping of their thinking about Indigenous Peoples, and to explore problematic visions of Indigenous communities that position them in pathologizing ways.

Finally, TCs developed their own versions of Walter and Andersen's standpoint diagram, to visualize and identify their own standpoints, and to consider points of tension or conflict that might arise from a different standpoint more clearly. TCs were aided in this exercise using other visualization tools, such as the iceberg of culture (Hall, quoted in BCCIE, 2020) and the social identities wheel (University of Michigan LSA, n.d.). In this way, TCs worked to develop nuanced and complex views of diverse student populations.

As TCs work to define their individual standpoints, they worked develop an awareness of their students' complex and numerous standpoints. Considering the complex and varied standpoints of diverse students enables TCs to "go beyond a tourist perspective of gaining surface-level information about another culture" (Short, 2009, p. 2). IYAL is a tool for exploring diverse standpoints and immersing TCs in stories that present vital information about the diverse axiologies, ontologies, epistemologies, and social positions of various peoples. Stories can then help TCs to go beyond the surface level constructions of cultures, and attempt deeper understanding and awareness.

INDIGENOUS YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

The focus on IYAL expands the work of teacher educators such as Reese (2013), Haddix and Price-Dennis (2013), Flores et al. (2019), and Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019) to use IYAL texts to support TCs' learning of Indigenous-specific topics. Like these scholars, engaging literature in teacher education classrooms allows TCs to explore the racism, oppression, and discrimination faced by Indigenous Peoples, who have had experiences like other people of color. TCs can examine Indigenous Peoples' experiences that have contributed to racialization and discrimination in various forms, including hurtful appropriation (Muñoz, 2022b), discriminatory representations of Indigenous mascots (Fryberg et al., 2008), and historicized visions of Indigenous Peoples that present them as relics of the past or as artifacts of bygone eras (Dunbar-Ortiz et al., 2019; Williams, 2012).

IYAL is a valuable learning tool that also enables TCs to grasp topics related to the politicization of Indigenous Peoples (Brayboy, 2005). By centering on IYAL, TCs can engage and explore the topics of reservation life, such as in Gansworth's nuanced stories of friendship and growth in *If I Ever Get Out of Here* (Gansworth, 2013) or the significance of treaty rights seen in Cynthia Leitich Smith's *Hearts Unbroken* (Smith, 2020). Other Indigenous authors offer powerful accounts of linguistic and cultural survivance, in the northern Arizona Dine community in *Healer of the Water Monster* (Young, 2021), and nuanced understandings of tribal sovereignty found in *Firekeepers Daughter* (Boulley, 2021). TCs must be aware of and understand these fundamentally important topics to effectively engage Indigenous students and support the needs of the Indigenous communities around their schools. Teachers can only decolonize their curricula (Battiste, 2013) by developing an awareness of and contextualizing Indigenous Peoples' history and contemporary experiences with settler colonialism and systemic racism. This journey can also result in beautiful imaginings and an understanding of Indigenous epistemology, kinships, and human and nonhuman relationships. By using IYAL, TCs can learn and understand the concepts of the course, while having "space to think and feel" (Archibald, 2008, p. 134).

TEXT SELECTIONS: GUIDELINES AND POSSIBILITIES

This section presents a series of principles for choosing IYAL texts for TCs, and offers examples from the course on how texts were employed to fulfill the principles. The principles listed here can be used to help implement text use in a classroom, as well as be used to make decisions on text use; exploring texts with the principles in mind can help TCs develop crucial awareness of Indigenous Peoples while also supporting them in future decision making about texts in their future classes. The principles of text selection introduced in this paper include influences from Indigenous authors and scholars like Reese (2013; 2008) Rice (2020), Muñoz (2022a), and Justice (2020), who have drawn from diverse fields, Indigenous studies, literature, journalism, critical Indigenous studies, decolonial and Indigenizing education to consider how to best support TCs in deeper understandings of Indigenous youth, both in teaching them, as well as in teaching about Indigenous Peoples.

This paper does not intend to present exhaustive or fixed guidelines for text selection processes; rather, this paper seeks to provide starting points for educators seeking to develop reading lists, activities, or entry points for exploring elements of Indigeneity. The principles illustrated here are a text selection and curriculum development option that educators can use on their journey to incorporate Indigenous perspectives in the classroom. The principles, *Use Texts That Feature*

Holistic Visions of Indigenous Peoples, Use Texts That Transmit Story and Cultural Reference Points, Use Texts That Present Indigenous Peoples' Standpoints, Use Texts with Positive Representation of Youth Experience offer one set of guidelines to make decisions and assess texts for effectiveness to use in courses. The principles offered below derive from teaching experiences with TCs, answering their questions during class conversations, as well as through reflexive conversations with scholars in the field of Indigenous studies and Indigenous literatures. Along with the applications of critical Indigenous literacies approaches (Reese, 2013) and intentional centering of Indigenous authors working to counteract erasure and silencing (Quigley, 2016) the principles are meant to be accessed and applied by any person utilizing texts with young people. This includes teachers, librarians, and family members, as well as teacher educators preparing future teachers working with youth.

PRINCIPLE 1: USE TEXTS THAT FEATURE HOLISTIC VISIONS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

IYAL can expose TCs to current and timely visions of Indigenous Peoples that show them as distinct peoples of the *now* (Battiste, 2013). At the same time, a goal of using IYAL is to present stories to shift discourses about Indigenous Peoples away from historicized visions that present their concerns, needs, and issues to consider their future aspirations and dreams. Using IYAL, TCs can explore Indigenous standpoints without essentializing or stereotyping Indigenous Peoples and create visions of Indigeneity that stretch throughout time and space (Dillon, 2012). A frequent question from TCs regarding the depictions of Indigenous Peoples in texts is related to depictions of violence and trauma. Often TCs felt anxious and weary of engaging stories that depicted trauma in Indigenous People's experiences, fearful of unintentionally communicating stereotyped or biased depictions. However, educators should not exclude stories of violence and trauma. Books such as *The Marrow Thieves* (Dimaline, 2017) and *Firekeeper's Daughter* (Boulley, 2021) contain elements of violence against the natural world, Indigenous women, and other beings that are crucial considerations for the contemporary world. The examples of violence in these texts also helps TCs recognize elements of settler colonial violence at work, and can help them develop clearer understandings of the intergenerational effects of settler colonialism. *The Marrow Thieves* (Dimaline, 2017), for example, depicts a number of violent acts, but these are contextualized and complemented with celebrations of survivance, joy, and future possibilities.

Dawn Quigley's *Apple in the Middle* (2018) offers one example of this principle at work: loosely autobiographical, the story offers careful readers insights into the experiences of Indigenous

Peoples, from working to understand one's identity, to exposure to language and cultural practices and family units. One of the most important elements of Quigley's book is the representation of Apple as she learns about her own sense of Indigeneity; it provides a window into the experiences of Indigenous youth, who may be on their own path towards greater understanding and awareness of their Indigeneity. Seeing this representation is also a subtle reminder to TCs that not all Indigenous Peoples have full and complete knowledge of their community or culture, and can give space for empathy and kindness. And while there are violent acts depicted in the text, the larger story is one of joy, connection, and relationship.

PRINCIPLE 2: USE TEXTS THAT TRANSMIT STORY AND CULTURAL REFERENCE POINTS

Using IYAL to approach a story requires rethinking the definition of a story, which often includes assumptions of oral communication and transmission. Rethinking story sharing using IYAL written texts enables TCs to access cultural reference points (Rice, 2020). Like counternarratives and testimonios, IYAL inclusive of cultural reference points is a hallmark of the narrative traditions of marginalized communities, and provides vital information that only members of the community can disseminate. And although there is a power within oral tradition, not everyone has access to a story, frequently because of colonizing mindsets which have erased stories and storytellers. IYAL texts can be instructive and impactful, similar to oral storytelling, as they provide readers with access to critical insights into settler colonialism; ways of interacting with Indigenous knowledge, ceremony, and protocol; and narratives sometimes inaccessible through oral communication.

A critical consideration for TCs is the conceptualization of the cultural reference points connected to relationships and kinship. Kinship understandings extend to human, but also to more than human beings as well. Justice (2018) notes that Indigenous literature identifies these tenets, noting that the key to being a good relative is to be “reaffirming—better, more generative, [practicing] more generous ways to uphold our obligations to our diverse and varied kin” (p. 84). Kinship with more than human beings is a practice in the stories of many Indigenous communities, illustrating connections and relationships with animals and plants, as well as water, spirits, and ancestors who have passed or are on the way.

In Erdrich's *The Birchbark House* (1999), along with seeing the amazing relationships between the family members and seeing how their connections shift and change over time, another remarkable set of relationships we see are between humans and crows, humans and bears, and humans and dogs. The unique treatment of the animal relatives, in respectful, thoughtful, and

equitable ways, presents a way to engage Justice's call to attention to our more than human relatives. The animal relatives in the book are not treated as metaphor, or as fairy tale; they are treated as relations, with all due responsibility and reverence for the part they play in the lives of the people in the story. They are not less than humans, nor are they worshiped or revered, but rather, they are treated as relatives.

PRINCIPLE 3: USE TEXTS THAT PRESENT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' STANDPOINTS

The texts selected for TCs focused on Indigenous authors who wrote about Indigenous peoples. They centered on Indigenous characters and epistemology, axiology, and ontology, representing a breadth of Indigenous Peoples' experiences. These texts were by no means exhaustive and did not address every nuance of the experiences of Indigenous Peoples. In keeping with the call for context-specific texts and avoiding text selection that leads to pan-Indigenizing and essentializing, local authors and stories were sought for the class. This is not to say that texts outside of the context of our school's region could not be used; using texts from outside of the local contexts and communities requires a careful discussion with TCs to demonstrate the potential for essentializing Indigenous experiences, while showing the value of exploring other accounts. Through the texts, the TCs gained exposure to knowledge of specific communities, protocols, practices, language, and kinship practices. Exploring Indigenous Peoples' standpoints is one way to challenge the "interpretive monopoly that Eurocentric thought reserves for itself" (Battiste, 2013, p. 95) and open the door for stories that show unique Indigenous ways of knowing.

In examining the multiple elements of Indigenous youth standpoints, it is vital to find texts that present multiple and diverse expressions of Indigenous Peoples' spectrum of experiences. Books like *Jonny Appleseed* (Whitehead, 2018), Jen Ferguson's *The Summer of Bitter and Sweet* (Ferguson, 2022) and Tehlor Kay Mejia's *Paola Santiago* trilogy (Mejia, 2020; 2021; 2022) offer depictions of Indigenous youth in the real-world spaces of Toronto (Whitehead, 2018) to the fantastical worlds of battling evil villains like La Llorona (Mejia, 2020), to the everyday experiences of working in an ice cream shop (Ferguson, 2022). What each text brings to TCs and other learners is a rich, nuanced, and varied depiction of Indigenous youth in all their complex glory, as they express diverse gender identities, sexual orientation, racial identity, and proximity to (and from) cultural knowledge. These stories help to communicate the diverse social positions of Indigenous Peoples, to demonstrate the multiple definitions of "Indigeneity."

PRINCIPLE 4: USE TEXTS WITH POSITIVE REPRESENTATION OF YOUTH EXPERIENCE

Using IYAL in teacher education also presents positive and compassionate visions of young people in general and Indigenous young people in particular. This positive framing occurs in two ways. The explicit use of young adult literature follows Reese's suggestion that adults recognize literature for young adults as a source of knowledge and insight (D. Reese, personal communication, November 21, 2019). At the same time, the positive framing of IYAL enables TCs to explore their conceptions of and, ideally, dispel negative, damage-centered visions (Tuck, 2009) of young people and Indigenous young people. IYAL, which almost always presents young adults as the narrators and protagonists, provides TCs with the opportunity to reflect on the discourses used to frame young people in pathological and deficit ways. Exploring young people's experiences through YAL can provide a contrasting view of them as resourceful and compassionate heroes who experience the world through their own lenses. Educators can use IYAL to approach young people with increased understanding, empathy, and clarity. The goal for educators is to support TCs to move to an understanding beyond trauma and violence, and towards healing and peace (Dillon, 2012).

Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) is one of the pivotal texts of the last 10 years. Part science fiction, part Indigenous methodologies, part political treatise, the stories that emerge from Dimaline's futuristic dystopia—which in many ways, seems more and more possible given the current political and environmental climate of our times—provides incredible accounts that many Indigenous readers have connected to, and resonated with. Non-Indigenous readers reported the powerful impact of this book on their understanding of Indigenous experiences (Muñoz, 2022a). While the story portrays horrendous moments of violence and trauma, it also contains narratives of hope, strength, healing, containing one of the most powerful one-word sentences in written text, that conveys the power of hope and possibility. Throughout the story, Dimaline presents the profound and painful experiences of young people struggling to survive, in every definition of the word. Their survival goes beyond physical safety, as the young people resourcefully interact with their environment, and each other to form bonds of love, community, as they move towards a hopeful survivance.

OTHER PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

IYAL can be a means of framing a classroom to shift—and hopefully, avoid—the process of transferring teaching responsibility to Indigenous People in the classroom, who are often presumed to be de facto experts on any topic related to all of Indigeneity. Focusing on fictional characters with

experiences that often mirror the real, lived experiences of Indigenous peoples enables learners to engage with important and sometimes painful topics without relying on members of marginalized communities to act as spokespeople for their identities or communities. This is true for many members of marginalized groups in classroom spaces, who are often tapped by dominant group members to teach concepts based on the personal experiences of being a marginalized. TCs can feel pressured to be the representative voice of an entire group, and receive no acknowledgement of the emotional and psychological work this takes; shifting the responsibility to the text and to the reader frees Indigenous learners to engage as much as they feel appropriate.

Another goal of using *IYAL* is the focus on texts produced for public consumption to avoid curriculum and pedagogy that is voyeuristic or exploitative of Indigenous peoples. At various points during the first year of using *IYAL* as a teaching tool, a large, mostly Indigenous, encampment of houseless folks emerged not far from campus. Several times, students were taken to walk past the encampment; for Indigenous Peoples at our institution, this decision was hugely problematic. The sense of Indigenous Peoples being on display, their challenges being publicly accessible, did not sit well with Indigenous students, faculty and staff, and the practice was eventually abandoned. Basing course learning on *IYAL* allows for the careful inquiry into concerns, questions, and basic knowledge without putting Indigenous Peoples on display in traumatizing and intrusive ways. Like the notion of keeping Indigenous students from the work of educating TCs, keeping Indigenous Peoples out of a voyeuristic gaze is a crucial step for TCs to comprehend and practice.

Finally, the goal of incorporating *IYAL* into teacher education courses can help to elevate adult's visions of the status of youth, young adults, and youth culture in the minds of future teachers. The hope here is that TCs will learn to consider the needs of young people during curriculum and pedagogy development, and to take their needs seriously (Rogers, 2001). This goes beyond incorporation of interest, as important a consideration as that is for TCs. Rather, engaging *IYAL* and other texts for young adults can help TCs develop a clearer understanding of the standpoints of their future students. *IYAL* can help TCs develop new stories about youth and young people, through narratives of young people's abilities, strengths, and contributions to their communities. Indigenous authors can help TCs envision youth in powerful, agentive, and nuanced ways, moving away from dominant discourses of youth as pathologized, in need of constant care, or in transition to adulthood, and in need of proper training or socialization. Indigenous authors create narratives of Indigenous youth—and youth, broadly—that show resourcefulness, creativity, strength, and a complexity of

emotional expression and regulation. Viewing young people in this way must be a goal for future educators in their work teaching.

NEXT STEPS

The number of texts, diversity of authors, and issues addressed in the literature continue to increase and become more complex. The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison provides yearly statistics on books produced by and about Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, Pacific Islander, and Arab communities and reviews of books from international publishing houses. In 2018, the CCBC (2019) documented 100 children's books by or about Indigenous Peoples, with 44 written by Indigenous authors. In 2021, that number increased to 133 books, with 60 written by Indigenous authors. However, these numbers remain low in representing the more than 600 federally and state-recognized tribes in the United States (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020). In the future, the hope would be to see books from every Indigenous community showing their young people's brilliance and creativity.

As teacher educators seek to incorporate diverse texts into their courses, they may feel challenged, fearful, and concerned about which books to use. Teacher educators may fear using the wrong texts, communicating the wrong information, or overstepping boundaries of information meant only for Indigenous peoples, and in so doing, transmit that misinformation to TCs. Frequently, Indigenous authors clearly indicate what can and cannot be published for public consumption, and depictions of cultural practices, beliefs, languages, and ceremonies are generally not published. Although the challenge of text identification and vetting might appear daunting, Battiste (2013) indicated that the task is an essential part of creating healing education.

An IYAL-based curriculum can enable future teachers to gain content knowledge crucial for their work in schools with Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. By engaging with these texts, educators can develop nuanced understandings of youth, Indigenous youth, and Indigenous Peoples and communities. When used well, IYAL can communicate vital information—not unlike oral storytelling practices—to present complete, reflective mirrors and intact, functioning windows and doorways to students (Bishop, 1990). These intact mirrors are crucial for Indigenous students who often find misrepresentation, or no representation at all in classroom spaces. And these texts can support non-Indigenous students to challenge the prevailing negative perspectives of Indigenous Peoples as well.

Along with providing powerful anti-oppressive visions of Indigenous Peoples, IYAL is also a beneficial tool for counteracting prevailing negative and pathologizing discourses of youth more broadly, and to center the experiences of young people with lenses of empathy and curiosity. IYAL presents childhood, adolescence, and youthhood experiences as legitimate and dynamic, occurring across a vast spectrum of complexity and nuance (Petrone et al., 2014). Centering IYAL is a way to explore the experience of young people as a legitimate site of inquiry, and to move away from the negative discourses of youth, which often present youth as being in a transition stage, or a passing period in the movement towards adulthood. IYAL can accomplish some of this work, and can be powerfully supplemented through nonfiction texts geared towards young adults, like *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults* (Kimmerer & Gray Smith, 2022) *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young Adults* (Dunbar-Ortiz et al., 2019) and *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism and You* (Reynolds & Kendi, 2020). Layering texts this way can support TCs in learning content while reminding them that life experiences of youth are crucial considerations when making curriculum decisions.

Several exciting new texts offer more diverse and nuanced expressions of Indigeneity for TCs to explore. Authors such as Kineo (2021) and Dimaline (2021) and series such as the *Misewa Saga* (Robertson, 2021a, 2021b) and the *Reckoner Trilogy* (Robertson, 2017, 2018, 2019) are examples of IYAL from Canadian authors that are incredible points of learning and discussion regarding culture, language, history, and the imaginary. Additionally, authors such as Bouley (2021), Little Badger (2021; 2020), and Young (2021) have explored facets of Indigenous culture and understanding and challenge the reader to consider epistemological frames of reference regarding physical and spiritual reality. Smith (2022) work as an author and activist has led to the establishment of Heartdrum Publishing and has highlighted authors focusing on Indigenous literary and visual artistry. Smith's work has provided contemporary visions of Indigeneity as "stories of everyday life and fantastical adventures...stories of heartache and hope" (Smith, 2022).

Asking teachers to learn and build a capacity for text selection to engage cultural awareness and responsiveness, with attention to the issues of settler colonialism, decolonization, and other topics, might be intimidating and 'yet another thing we ask teachers to do.' However, considering these concepts should not be additional work on top of the so-called "regular" curriculum, but an attempt to reconfigure TC's paradigms for their curricular and pedagogical tasks. Current approaches to text selection are often based on choices made historically in the school, based solely

on the available resources, or in maintaining fidelity to the so-called canon. However, these processes of text selection are replete with subconscious biases in TCs standpoints and paradigms. TCs should be supported at multiple levels to engage the steps needed to reshape their paradigms around teaching and learning. Along with university courses, several states have also produced resources to support educators in making choices for incorporating Indigenous materials. The Montana Office of Public Instruction (McCluskey & Ferguson, 2015) the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community in Minnesota (Wood-Krueger, 2022) and the Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington State (Washington Office of Superintendent of Instruction of Public Instruction) all have developed materials for teachers at all grade levels to use in everything from text selection to lesson plans for classroom use in k-12 classrooms. Resources like these can support teachers in creating a reflective approach to Indigenous text usage in the classroom. Developing capacity for awareness and practicing reimagining of paradigms are steps toward creating ethical spaces to achieve the decolonization (Battiste, 2013) needed to provide healthier educational experiences for Indigenous students.

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