

## **Honoring Indigenous Children's Ways of Knowing**

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This chapter presents the ways Indigenous students' voices and ways of knowing were honored in an urban, elementary classroom in Western Canada during literacy learning. It focuses on how four Grade three students at Belleheights School co-constructed and negotiated their identities as literacy learners. The classroom teacher designed a learning environment that facilitated and created spaces for students to construct meaning that honored their diverse ways of knowing and provided ways for them to access their funds of knowledge. I discuss how four Indigenous children brought their cultural ways of knowing to support their literacy learning, more specifically how they used their funds of knowledge to support meaning-making and identity construction. This interpretive case study revealed that the students' participation influenced their literacy development, which in turn honored the students' voices. The participants used multiliteracies and culture to co-construct and transform their identities. Multiple data-collection methods were used, including observations, field notes, collection of artifacts, conversations and informal interviews to provide a rich and holistic description. Interpretive analysis of data revealed the importance of multiliteracies as a means of including diverse voices, texts and cultures in school literacy.

As part of my traditional cultural practice, I need to situate myself before I present my research findings. I identify as Michif (Métis). Métis are one of the Indigenous groups in Canada. I use the term Michif, instead of Métis, because that is our name for ourselves to exemplify our distinct culture, language and traditions. I come from over four generations of Michif families in Northern Saskatchewan, Batoche and Red River settlements in what is now Canada. I am a mother of three amazing girls and a grandmother. I grew up surrounded by my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins and hearing a lot of stories in the form of oral narratives. I enjoyed hearing stories about the northern lights, roogaroos (shape-shifters) and stories of people's lives told in warning so you would not end up like so-and-so who didn't pay attention to the warnings. I attribute my own success in school to my love of reading, which I believed was fostered through my love of stories since I grew up listening to a lot of them.

The statistics around the literacy learning of Indigenous people paints a grim picture for the academic achievement of Indigenous children and youth. Canadian statistics show an increasing literacy gap between Indigenous people and other Canadians (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, 2008; Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2009). Contemporary external research has tended

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to emphasize the deficits compared to non-Indigenous standards instead of the positive outcomes of Indigenous learning (Niles, Byers & Krueger, 2007; Vogt, Jordan & Tharp, 1987). Success in reading is certainly linked to academic success (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2009; Ogle et al., 2003); conversely, those who struggle with reading often face school failure. Children who struggle with literacy learning risk school failure given the important role of reading in contributing to school success (Juel, 1988; Philips, Norris, Osmond & Maynard, 2002; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Tunmer, 2008). However, as a classroom teacher I saw many Indigenous students do well with literacy learning, and looking at my own experiences I also did very well. Seeing that there are Indigenous people who do well in school led me to wonder what allowed some students to do well and others to struggle. I was interested in the literacy practices that support the literacy learning of Indigenous children and whether these practices were congruent and responsive to their cultural identity.

This study was situated in a Western Canadian urban center. In Canada, many people use the terms Indigenous or Aboriginal interchangeably. Indigenous peoples are defined as those who descended from the original inhabitants of a territory and have unique cultures and traditions that are different from those of the settler population (United Nations, n.d.). Aboriginal is defined according to the Canadian Constitution of 1982, which allows three different groups to identify as Canada's Aboriginal people. The Métis, Indians (First Nations) and Inuit were constitutionally recognized as Canada's Aboriginal people in the 1982 Constitution Act. Within these three groups, there is a diverse range of cultures, beliefs, customs and history. I have used the appropriate term wherever possible to acknowledge the diversity within these groups and to describe the focal children because they identify as Métis, Cree or Dene. From time to time I use the term Indigenous to refer to all three groups or Aboriginal owing to previous research or articles that have used a particular term.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC, 2016) and other research (Adams, 1989; Battiste, 2000; Hampton, 1995; McKeough et al., 2008; Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples, 1996) demonstrated that Canada's Indigenous people have faced marginalization in educational systems across the country. It is disturbing that research indicates that negative educational experiences contribute to the widening literacy gap between Indigenous and other Canadians at all educational levels (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008; Richards, 2008). Educational attainment among Indigenous people, on average, is considerably lower than non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2005). Because schooling potentially determines future employment and economic stability, it is essential to make changes to ensure that Indigenous students have access to the same resources as students in the rest of Canada. The road to low literacy along with the high percentage of school dropouts and school failure among Indigenous people in Canada are a result of assimilationist practices in education and colonization. The increasing movement of Indigenous people to urban centers over the last 50 years has required that school curriculum reflect the cultural diversity

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in schools. Conversely, many teachers in urban centers are ill-equipped because of their lack of knowledge regarding students' cultural backgrounds and often are unwilling to allow culturally relevant practices to accommodate Indigenous children (Friesen & Friesen, 2002). As a result, many Indigenous students drop out of school. Yet, amidst this legacy of assimilation, many other Indigenous people become proficient readers and writers who receive high school diplomas, and some go on to postsecondary education and training.

Different communities value different practices, and depending on to which community a person belongs, certain practices are valued over others. These sociocultural practices, which include language and literacy practices, determine how people will see themselves and form their identities. Many children and youth arrive at school using language and literacy practices that are not congruent with school literacy and thus face the challenge of navigating literacy practices that are discordant with their home or community literacy practices. Yet many children from these minority communities are still able to do very well in school. Society has given schools the role of determining which literacy practices have the most currency to secure employment, political power, and cultural recognition (New London Group, 1996, 2000). Schools need to do a better job of accounting for children's out-of-school identities (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012). Identity plays an important role in literacy learning, which highlights the importance of aligning school literacy practices with the identities of Indigenous children.

Children bring language knowledge and abilities with them to school (Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) as well as knowledge from their lives and communities that they can access to make connections and inferences to comprehend text (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). Many children come to school with a great deal of knowledge and experience with different literacies and use language in ways that help them to transition to school literacies (Dyson, 1997). School literacy refers to the ways of using language to enable students to have success to literacy events in school that are tied to learning outcomes. It emphasizes reading and writing and the task of teaching students to read and write. Therefore, exploring the ways that children use language, the knowledge and experiences that they bring with them into the classroom and how they participate in literacy practices framed this research.

I conducted a qualitative study using case study methodology to investigate how the funds of knowledge that the participants brought into the classroom support their literacy learning. This inquiry involved the examination of an elementary classroom in which the classroom teacher created a literacy-rich environment to support reading instruction while integrating multiliteracies. The study centered on the literacy experiences of four focal children, Connor, Karl, Margaret and Shayla (all names as pseudonyms) in the Grade Three classroom of Belleheights School.

Belleheights is a prekindergarten to Grade 8 community school located in the west central area of an urban prairie Canadian city. Belleheights is an older area of the city and identified as a lower-income, inner-city neighbourhood. For this reason some residents benefit from affordable housing, and community

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economic development initiatives have improved the lives of residents in the area. The demographics of the school consisted mostly of lower socioeconomic families; specifically, 51% of the students self-declared as First Nations or Métis and 13% as English-as-an-Additional-Language (EAL) students. In addition, a growing number of immigrant families are from Asia and northern Africa. The school offered a nutritional program of breakfast and lunch for those who needed it as well as a morning snack. The nutrition program fed about 90 to 100 students each day of the over 260 registered students. The Grade Three classroom was situated on the second floor with 22 students who varied in ability and ethnicity. In this classroom, 52% of the class identified as First Nations or Métis, 33% identified as EAL students, and 14% required the assistance of an educational assistant (EA). In some school jurisdictions, the EA has also been known as a teacher's assistant. The EA supported students who were categorized with cognitive needs and required additional academic supports and thus additional funding. The EAL students came from Uzbekistan, Iraq, Ethiopia, India, Thailand and the Philippines. Two of the students were diagnosed as autistic, and one student was labelled cognitively delayed.

In consultation with the classroom teacher, Ms. Reed, six Indigenous children were invited to participate. Students were invited to be focal participants based on who self-identified as First Nations, Métis or Inuit and who demonstrated competency as proficient readers. Ms. Reed also considered these students ideal focal participants because they enjoyed talking about themselves as readers and writers. Four of the six focal children returned signed consent forms from their parents or guardians, although all were eager to participate. The focal children were two boys and two girls: Connor, Karl, Margaret and Shayla.

**Connor.** Connor is an energetic and loquacious boy who identified as First Nation but did not specify a specific tribal group affiliation. He was the biggest boy in the class. In our interview he said that he wanted to play football and confidently told me, "I have the size for it." Ms. Reed commented on Connor's willingness to help. I witnessed his alacrity to help others several times during my visits. For example, Ms. Reed needed to move a student's desk to make room for the audiovisual cart that transported her laptop and projector. Connor was ready to assist and picked up the desk to move it out of the way. To depict this more vividly, Connor did not simply slide the desk out of the way or pick up one end to move it; he grabbed the edges of the desk and lifted it as high into the air as he could, over the top of the other desks, to move it to the other side. This was no easy feat for a Grade 3 student, but because Connor was bigger; he had a physical advantage over his classmates. Connor enjoyed reading illustrated novels and informational books about war. During our interview he told me that he did not read at home, but he knew that reading would help him to do well in school. It was also evident that he was well regarded among his peers, because he was the leader in the classroom and assisted many of them in the computer lab. Connor used computers proficiently, which his classroom teacher acknowledged. Ms. Reed would ask Connor to assist other students who struggled with navigating their way on the computers. She remarked on Connor's outgoing nature and placed

him in a position of influence with his peers. He liked to make jokes and had a good sense of humour, which made him a favourite among his peers, and they would follow his lead or imitate him. I also observed Connor working diligently during learning activities. Rarely was he diverted. Ms. Reed would inform the students that completing an activity was their passport to the outside, and Connor would make sure that he finished his work so that he could be dismissed for recess. During class discussions Connor always contributed. He was quick to raise his hand to share ideas, make connections or ask questions.

**Karl.** Karl is a middle child in his family and has an older sister and brother and a younger sister and brother. He identified as Métis and remarked during our interview that his favourite class was culture, where a majority of the learning activities involved the Cree and Métis cultures. Karl also participated in jigging and square dancing with the school dance group. During our preinterview activity, Karl reported that his grandma and poppa spoke Cree. He knew the Cree words for 'come' (*astum*), 'go away' (*awas*) and 'sit' (*api*). Karl's family moved frequently, and he commented that he had left many of his possessions in his old house. I wondered whether Karl's family had left possessions behind because they had to leave in a hurry, there was a break-up in the family or they had financial difficulties and were unable to regain access to the dwelling to collect their possessions. He further elucidated his family's financial challenges when he told me that the family often sent its laptop to the pawnshop to be fixed. Karl did not seem to understand why they took the laptop to the pawnshop; his parents might have been shielding him from the truth about how they managed to cope financially.

Karl was in Ms. Reed's Grade 2/3 class the previous year and was very familiar with her expectations and routines. As part of the preinterview activity, Karl created a daily schedule in which he outlined his role and responsibilities at school during both the before- and after-school care program and school hours. Following the rules and fairness were important to Karl; he made sure that his fellow students were also aware of the rules and would point out any situation that he deemed unfair. It was easy to engage Karl in conversation because, notably, he was the first student to come over to talk to me. I observed his curiosity about everything that was going on around him. He would constantly survey the room to see what other students were doing, and many times he would check to see what other students were doing. Even when I would work with other students, Karl would stop by to see what was happening or find out whether there was a way for him to be involved. He often peeked out the door into the hall when I was working with another focal child.

Karl was always very quick to interact in whatever he found interesting, and he always had something to share or questions that he wanted answered. I observed him access the numerous movies that he has watched and several video games to make connections to other texts. On my first visit to the Grade 3 classroom, Karl was reading an informational book on artists. It was evident that he enjoyed sharing his connections of text-to-text and text-to-self. Karl made sure that his teacher heard his thoughts, whether she elicited them or not! Being the first at or in the center of activities was important; he would always

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try to be at the front of the line, make sure that his books or pages were in front or on top of everyone else's and often leave his home base to sit at the table or desk in the center of room.

**Margaret.** Margaret is a thoughtful and considerate student who volunteered every day to pick up the morning snack for the class. Margaret lived with her mother, father and an older sister. She did not limit her family in the city to whomever she lived with, but included an aunt and cousins with whom she went to movies. She was very proud of being Dene and enjoyed visiting her grandparents in the northern Dene community where they lived. Also, she knew a few words in Dene. She owned two dogs and a cat and told me during our preinterview activity that she loved animals. Margaret owned her own laptop, which was a gift from her grandmother. Her grandmother featured in many of her stories about family and her Dene culture. The pride in her Dene culture and background was evident in her stories of family.

Margaret was in Ms. Reed's Grade 2/3 class the previous year. Ms. Reed informed me that that year Margaret rarely contributed and struggled with reading and writing, but that she had witnessed considerable change in Margaret's literacy skills over the last couple of months in Grade 3. Ms. Reed told me that Margaret had created her own dictionary to assist her with spelling. I observed Margaret's ability to express herself poetically and her enjoyment of learning words. She loved animals, which extended into her choice of animal books to read, and she also expressed the desire to be a veterinarian when she was older. In addition, she enjoyed reading illustrated novels such as *Geronimo Stilton* in class. Margaret was a consistent contributor to, and participant, in classroom discussions. She asked good questions and offered explanations to others. It was apparent in her contributions to class discussions that she noticed the connections between texts. Her teacher informed me that Margaret was rarely absent and had missed only a couple of days of school because of illness. During our preinterview activity, Margaret remarked that she loved school.

**Shayla.** Shayla is a large, shy girl who identified as belonging to the Cree nation. Shayla and her mother lived with her grandmother, to whom she referred by using the Cree term *kohkum*. Shayla loved to talk one-on-one and tell stories about her cousins and *kohkum*. She consistently arrived at school late, often not until 10:00 a.m. At school she did not participate in class discussions. She participated in the literacy activities through independent reading and writing, but would often ask for help with her work when she was required to write. Shayla would ask me to sit beside her when she was at school. I took advantage of these invitations because she was often late or absent during my visits. When I sat with her, she was talkative. She loved to tell stories about her family, talk about her cousins—what they had done on the weekend or the previous evening—and spend time with her *kohkum*. These stories evidenced the importance of family in Shayla's life. I asked her why she did not share her stories with the rest of the class, and she informed me that she is shy. During my observations I noted that Shayla did not become involved in class discussions but would spend most of her time looking at something or turning away from the teacher. When Shayla arrived



late and the class was in the middle of a literacy activity, Ms. Reed would make her way over to Shayla's home base and explain what the activity was and what the students were required to do. She would start Shayla on the literacy activity and then move on to assist other students. Shayla would start the work while Ms. Reed was there, but once the teacher left to help other students, Shayla would not continue on her own. I did not observe her completing literacy activities by herself, but usually with the support of more knowledgeable others. The EA, Ms. Reed, or I would assist Shayla or she would look at the work of her table partner to complete the minimum requirements of the literacy activity. When I sat with her to assist her on a literacy activity, she preferred to tell me stories about her family rather than complete the task.

The four children used talk to construct meaning and identify themselves as literacy learners. I elucidate these findings within the context of sociocultural learning and literacy theories. Sociocultural theories of learning and literacy posit the role of social interactions and culturally determined tools in the course of intellectual development (Diaz, Neal & Amaya-Williams, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Thus, the relationship between language and social interaction is significant. As learners, we create relationships with others through language and social interaction. Similarly, we negotiate and co-construct our identities through language and social interaction. Sociocultural theorists and researchers Lewis, Enciso and Moje (2007) argued, "Few other theories attempt to account for such a wide range of mediators in human literacy learning and practice" (p. 3). Therefore, the sociocultural theories of learning and literacy cast "light on the education of people whose language, literacy, and very being have traditionally been marginalized or disenfranchised in schools and societies" (p. 3). The four focal students identified as First Nations, Cree, Dene or Métis and carry with them the history of marginalization in education. This observation prompted me to recall the work of Bell et al. (2004) who conducted case-study research on ten different schools with successful Aboriginal education programs and concluded that "Aboriginal students need to learn in a setting that recognizes their needs, values their culture and identity, and challenges and equips them to succeed" (p. 325). They stressed the need for culturally relevant teaching and resources to support literacy learning. The literacy learning of children occurs in a social environment through a co constructed, culturally relevant landscape. For this reason I used a sociocultural framework to situate my research.

Children learn language and cultural knowledge from their homes and communities and bring this knowledge with them when they enter school. It is important to discuss the knowledge that children bring because they use it to further their learning about language in school; as well, the children who participated in this inquiry draw on this knowledge when they read, respond to what they have read and participate in literacy practices. *Funds of knowledge* refers to the "idea that every household is, in a very real sense, an educational setting in which the major function is to transmit knowledge that enhances the survival of its dependents" (Moll & Greenberg, 1990, p. 320). The sharing of knowledge is vital to the development and sustenance of households. Moll, Amanti, Neff

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and Gonzalez (1992) sought to develop “innovations in teaching that drew on the knowledge and skills from local households” (p. 132) by studying Mexican families in Arizona. They claimed that, by “capitalizing on the household and other community resources, we can organize classroom instruction that far exceeds” (p. 132) what many of these children were already experiencing in school. Using ethnographic and case-study methods, Moll et al. found a diverse body of knowledge that families and individuals use as part of their day-to-day living and survival. They used the term “funds of knowledge to refer to these historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133). They also studied how families and individuals use their funds of knowledge to meet the challenges that they encounter socially and economically as well as the networks that facilitate the exchange of resources among households. Moll and Greenberg (1990) contended that students can access their funds of knowledge during school literacy practices as a means of bridging what they already know from their family and/or community to support learning and using school literacy practices. Therefore, teachers can give students opportunities to access their funds of knowledge to further support their literacy learning.

The more information that a classroom teacher has about his or her students’ funds of knowledge, the more that he or she is able to use this information to transform classroom practices that help students to access their funds of knowledge. According to Moll and Greenberg (1990), it is “unnecessary and unfeasible for individuals or households to possess all this knowledge; when needed, such knowledge is available and accessible through social networks” (p. 323). Additionally, because it is unfeasible for an individual to possess all the knowledge, it makes sense for teachers to tap into the collective knowledge of their students to make learning in the classroom authentic and meaningful. Using students’ funds of knowledge emphasizes the value of the knowledge they possess and of sharing that knowledge to benefit the group.

Funds of knowledge also bring students’ knowledge and experiences to the forefront. According to Giroux (1992), “Students have memories, families, religions, feelings, languages, and cultures that give them a distinct voice. We can critically engage that experience and we can move beyond it. But we can’t deny it” (p. 17). Students need to understand their collective knowledge and have opportunities to share with others. Giroux suggested that students’ experiences need to be “recognized as the accumulation of collective memories and stories that provide students with a sense of familiarity, identity, and practical knowledge” (p. 104). Tapping into students’ funds of knowledge honors this collective wisdom that shapes their identity.

### **Multiliteracies in Representing Meaning and Constructing Identities**

The focal students used multiliteracies to bring their lived experiences, background knowledge and funds of knowledge into school literacy. Multiliteracies involve the multiple ways that meaning can be constructed and represented. They enabled the four students I observed to co-construct meaning by permitting



diversity in ways of knowing and representing what they came to know. The focal students found ways to make connections to their lived experiences and represent their identities through the use of multiliteracies. The New London Group (1996) coined the term multiliteracies to describe the shifting and evolving way that digital technology, globalization, and cultural diversity have changed literacy learning and teaching. Kalantzis and Cope (2012) identified two parts of multiliteracies: The first involves social diversity, and the second involves multimodality. Because many definitions of literacy have traditionally focused on only a singular meaning-making system with oral and print texts, we need a way to describe the various modes of representation that vary with the culture and context and have “specific cognitive, cultural and social effects” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5). We have many modes through which to communicate and represent knowledge. Ideas and knowledge can be communicated in print through writing, orally by speaking, graphically via images, visually using artistic means, audibly with sound, through gestures by means of facial expression, spatially via body movement, and in video by means of combining sound and image. Some modes of representation can be more powerful than others depending on their context. Students can share different meanings and knowledge by using different or multiple modes of representation. The use of multiliteracies helps students to bring their own experiences, backgrounds and practices into the classroom and highlights that different meanings are possible depending on the contexts, individuals, and cultures (New London Group, 1996, 2000).

The focal students central to this study accessed funds of knowledge from their family, cultures and lived experiences as part of their multiliteracies. Funds of knowledge can include all types of cultural knowledge that helps us to make sense of our world and negotiate literacies. The four focal children resided in an urban context where they had access to many types of knowledge from their social participation and lived experiences with family, community and popular culture. In their research Moll et al. (1992) found that if teachers look to students’ families and lived experiences, they can make learning more relevant by tapping into the students’ cultural and cognitive resources. Similarly, teachers can also tap into children’s lived experiences with popular culture as a cultural and cognitive resource.

A classroom in which children use popular culture as a fund of knowledge validates their experiences and honors their identity. Popular culture and media are important elements of childhood identity. It provides children with knowledge and indirect lived experiences that they can leverage into meaningful learning opportunities. Leaving popular culture out of the classroom comes at the cost of denying children access to some very salient resources. Most school literacy practices rely on children’s experiences with children’s literature. The literacy practices valued in school are not often present in the homes of children of low socioeconomic status or from minority cultures (Heath, 1983; Marsh & Millard, 2000; Taylor & Dorsey Gaines, 1988). As Dyson (2003, p. 356) states:

A curriculum permeable to children’s textual resources, particularly

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media resources, seems especially important in classrooms serving children of economically limited means and children of color. Children who can be so described are less likely than middle-class White children to have cultural and communicative resources recognized and built on in school.

The students accessed funds of knowledge from popular culture to construct meaning and make school literacy practices meaningful. Children's popular culture includes music, sport, computers and related merchandise, books, magazines, television and film, but also incorporates websites, toys, games, comics, stickers, cards, clothing, hair accessories, jewelry, sports accessories, oral rhymes, jokes, word play, food and drink (Marsh & Millard, 2000). The students' literacy development relied on how they connected their experiences with popular texts to school literacy practices. Dyson (2003) identified "children's experiences with popular media as integral to the formation of contemporary childhoods" (p. 330), thus creating alternate "pathways through which children enter into school literacy practices" (p. 330). The students could draw on their experiences with television, movies, video games and music to help them to construct meaning when they transacted with texts in the classroom.

Children are influenced by popular culture and can draw on these experiences to construct meaning (Noll, 2000). Connections between texts in school and popular texts from out-of-school literacy practices make school literacy practices meaningful and authentic. Out-of-school literacies are the ways in which we use reading and writing in social environments, at home and in community spaces. Out-of-school literacy practices afford avenues of communication for social or daily activities. For example, Karl used the out-of-school literacy practices of watching the movie *X-men: First Class*, viewing tabloid news on celebrities, such as popular music star Justin Bieber, and reading books at school as resources to co-construct meaning and make connections when he used multiple literacies. Karl recontextualized popular culture to support his meaning-making (Dyson, 2003). For example, during class discussions on drug use in the Olympics, Karl made a connection between drugs and Justin Bieber. Karl and Connor chimed back and forth "*JB going to jail and getting out of jail*," which demonstrates their understanding that drug use has negative consequences.

The children also drew on popular texts when they made connections between viewing and reading. These connections brought something meaningful from their lives, something that they all shared and could identify with as a school literacy practice. The children's membership and belonging "was founded on a shared cultural landscape in which media materials are woven into the fabric of their lives as young children growing up in a densely packed urban area" (Dyson, 2000, p. 344). Additionally, in Karl and Connor's communication they designed their identities as people who know about popular culture by using what they had either seen or heard through the media. Dyson explained that "an audiovisual story experienced at home might become an occasion for verbal affiliation or even competition with peers, as children demonstrated expertise about a valued story"

(p. 332). The students accessed popular texts to support their literacy learning as well as demonstrate to their peers that they were 'in the know' about things that people valued. For example, when Karl used popular texts to make connections, he not only shared what he knew about those texts, but also communicated that he was someone who watched movies and video games. For many children, being able to share that they have watched the latest movie or popular television show or played a new video game raises their status among their peers. As a classroom teacher, I would often hear students bragging to one another about how many times they had watched a particular movie or that they had just purchased a new game for their gaming console. When students are able to discuss the plot and characters of popular television shows or movies and contribute to discussions on celebrities and sports icons, it raises their status among their peers because they have access to information that is considered valuable. Popular culture and texts have social capital (Marsh, 2012).

Popular culture can be viewed as an "everyday culture," and the texts associated with it are "part of students' everyday literacies" and thus "hold powerful and personal meanings for students" (Alvermann & Xu, 2003, p. 150). Children are immersed in popular culture as part of their daily lives as they come to know characters who traverse between print and screen; share in the lives of television, movie and music personalities; and appropriate words from songs, movies and television shows. The media (in this context referring to forms of mass communication, such as television, radio and the Internet) were resources for the students to use when they co-constructed and negotiated meaning and created relationships by connecting to each other through similar experiences. For example, Ms. Reed told me that in the fall of that year Connor had created a character named *Bemo* who he not only featured in many of his creative writing stories, but also referred to in conversation. Ms. Reed did not know where Connor had heard the word *Bemo*, but I speculate that he was influenced by what he had heard when he watched television. The Bank of Montreal advertises its banking services in television commercials and uses the acronym *BMO*, which is pronounced *Bee mo*. It is highly plausible that Connor heard the word and recontextualized it. Connor's use of *Bemo* brought something from his unofficial world into the official world of school (Dyson, 2013). Ms. Reed recalled that whenever Connor could find a way to work his character *Bemo* into a class discussion, he would, and his classmates began to use the name *Bemo* as well. *Bemo* was a spontaneous re-creation that the students transformed and then negotiated its particular use. Dyson (2003) remarked that children can transform any material "across different symbolic modes, different social expectations, and, always, different moment-to-moment interactional contingencies, as language users negotiate meanings with and for others" (p. 333).

Children's involvement and interests motivate much of their learning (Moll et al., 1992). In the focal participant's glogs, their identity and interests were present. 'Glogs' are digital posters that were created on Glogster, an online platform whose users create multimodal posters that incorporate text, audio, video, graphics and images. The glogs were filled with symbolic representations of the

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students' identities and were examples of what Dyson (2003) described as a child bringing his or her unofficial world into the official world of school. Similar to the children in Dyson's study, these students created glogs that "were guided by their experiences with varied kinds of cultural texts, including media texts, as they entered into the new demands of school literacy" (p. 333). Not only were the students called upon to write as a means of communicating their thinking, but they also needed to utilize digital tools to represent what they came to know. Moreover, these glogs were populated with images that were meaningful or interesting to them. Karl created a glog to represent the Olympic value of peace (Figure 1). On the glog he used the images and symbols of a basketball, an axe, a jewelled cross, a skateboard, a disco ball, crowns, an unhappy face, dollar signs located inside drops of oil and a black background. At first I thought that he had not met the requirements of the task, but after talking to Karl about his glog, I discovered that these images and symbols resonated with him personally: They were from his lived experience with popular culture.

Figure 1. Karl's glog on the Olympic value of peace.



Karl described his glog to me and explained his image choices and how he had found the images. Pointing at the dollar sign, Karl said, "*Money sign is for peace,*" which linked the images to the task of creating a poster that reflects an Olympic value. He continued, "*I put a happy face; it should be on here somewhere.*" He also informed me that another student had shown him how to change the background of his glog. During our conversation Karl wanted to know whose glogs I had copied to see what each person had done. When he saw that Connor had included many videos, in an attempt to avoid being outdone, he announced

that he had also tried to put a video on his glog:

*I put a video on my [glog], but I deleted it because it didn't work. It was one of those—I wrote Olympics, and every time I played it, it like just didn't play. It just—I wrote peace, and there was one where he was making it out of one dollar, but it didn't want to play on me.*

Karl's glog displayed a basketball and a skateboard, and I inquired whether he liked basketball and skateboards. He began to tell me about a basketball video that he had watched in which the players did not share the basketball; he then switched to a story about a basketball game that he had watched at school. Rather than watching the basketball game, he and a small group of friends started to play their own mini game of basketball on the stage:

*There is like different ones. There's music, and it says that, and you hit that, and then there is all these like music bands, and it looks like it is actually playing. I looked up basketball on YouTube, and there's a basketball video, and they are like fighting over a ball, and like they weren't sharing the ball. And same as—I was watching a basketball game; it was after school. Our school didn't win; it was the other school.*

In many discussions Karl referred to his out-of-school life and popular culture. I redirected him to his glog and asked him to explain what he had done. He informed me that the unhappy face depicted how he felt about his sister, except that his eyes did not have crosses (Xs). He said he put the crowns on because of a king and queen. The cross graphic reminded him of a movie that he had seen, and he began to describe the movie to me. In our interview Karl told me that he watched movies every day after school. He drew on knowledge from the movies and videos to support his other literacy practices, such as making connections. Popular culture and texts give children an abundance of ideas from which to draw when they construct knowledge and represent their knowledge (Dyson, 2003; Marsh & Millard, 2000; Noll, 2000). Karl pulled together his experiences and things that he saw around him as resources to transform his meaning-making and co-construct his identity.

What appeared to be random images were actually visual representations that had meaning to Karl. He made connections to each of the images, graphics and textual features. His glog conveyed a message that visually represented how he saw his life and experiences. Even though it did not clearly reflect an Olympic value, it did reflect things that Karl valued in his life and how he saw himself. He understood the task and tried to connect the money symbol to the Olympic value that was supposed to be the focus of his digital poster. Karl shared information during our discussion about his glog that supported many of my interpretations. He liked to be at the forefront and did not want to be outdone. When I showed him Connor's glog, Karl pointed out that he tried to include multimodal texts through videos on his glog. Karl needed to be ahead or on par with his peers. It was evident that he did not want to be seen as a less proficient computer user

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than Connor was. Additionally, he enjoyed talking about what he had watched and referring to videos and movies. Karl experienced popular culture and reified it through his own representations and meaning-making (Dyson, 2003).

When children bring their out-of-school lives into official school literacy experiences, it is another means of validating their experiences and making school literacy practices meaningful to them (Dyson, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2002). Many children engage in reading and writing through popular texts rather than school-based texts that are not part of their lived experience. Dyson pointed out that a curriculum open to children's popular culture is important for children of lower socioeconomic status who might not have the same cultural and communicative resources as children from higher socioeconomic demographics do. Marsh and Millard (2000) also contended that a large number of children in schools do not have home literacy experiences from the books and story experiences that White middle-class families value and that are also aligned with school literacy practices. Marsh and Millard underlined the need "to make more teachers familiar with some of the literacy practices experienced by children in their homes and communities and to support teachers in using these to motivate positive learning experiences in school" (p. 4). Using popular texts in the classroom is another means for all students to engage in classroom literacy practices.

Culture was also an important part of the focal children's out-school-lives because they all had close connections to extended family. In interviews and informal conversations, they all shared personal narratives about family gatherings and time that they spent visiting grandparents, playing with cousins and being at home with siblings. Dyson and Genishi (1994) acknowledged stories as "an important tool for proclaiming ourselves as cultural beings" (p. 4). The students brought their culture into school spaces through their stories and personal connections, collective knowledge, and participation in school cultural events and activities. The focal children understood themselves according to cultural identities framed by what they knew and what they did rather than an emphasis on what they were not.

Children find objects at home or create them in school that link to stories from their culture or family. Artifacts that they bring from home to school connect the home and school. They tie together out-of-school literacy practices and school literacy practices. Margaret used the bracelet that she wore as a tangible referent to her cultural identity. An artifact such as Margaret's bracelet embodied her identity and lived experience as a Dene. Pahl and Rowsell (2010) described an artifact as "an embodiment of lived experience,... [as] it symbolizes and represents relationships and events that matter" (p. 1) and as possessing "physical features that make it distinct; created, found, carried, put on display, hidden, evoked in language, or worn; embodies people, stories, thoughts, communities, identities, and experiences; valued or made by a meaning maker in a particular context" (p. 2). How people present themselves by what they choose to wear communicates to others how they want to be seen (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012).

Margaret was proud of being Dene and constructed meaning through connections to life in the northern community where her grandmother lived. They



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visited each other, and her grandmother gave anecdotal evidence of why she should be proud to be Dene. Weber-Pillwax (2001) stressed the importance of family ties and a strong connection to community to support Aboriginal children's success in school. When Margaret shared her knowledge about the Dene, she was also communicating that she was someone who was proud to be Dene. She showed me the bracelet made of beads and informed me that "*Dene people are very good at beading.*"

Cultural groups carry defining features through a shared understanding of what makes them belong to or what makes them different from other groups. I believe that Margaret's grandmother wanted her to be proud of her heritage. Several times Margaret shared her knowledge of the Dene while she worked on literacy activities. For example, I sat beside Margaret when the students wrote their own Olympic Athletes' pledge. As she wrote on her handout, she said, "*Dene like to eat moose meat, bannock, and lazy bannock.*" I asked her what lazy bannock was, and she replied, "*It has a hole in it.*" Bannock with a hole is usually the fried variety, which carries a different meaning than bannock without a hole in terms of preparation and taste. How the bannock is made represents meaning and connects those who share that meaning. Knowing the difference between the types of bannock is cultural knowledge, and being able to share this knowledge with others creates a relationship. Being able to identify bannock not only demonstrates cultural knowledge, but also involves literacies, because we attribute meaning to it. Literacies are more than reading print texts that are valued in school; Aboriginal people find literacies across the environment (Hare, 2005).

*Aboriginal literacies* refers to Indigenous people's use of multiple texts from the environment and their experiences to develop relationships. Some of these texts are dreams, visions, oral stories and artifactual objects in the environment (Little Bear, 2009). Therefore, Aboriginal literacies are more than just reading and writing; they include relationships with the environment and community (Antone, 2003) and interpreting visions, negotiating the meanings of stories, communicating with nature and reading the landscape, to name a few (Little Bear, 2009). Aboriginal literacies are characterized by holism, the inclusion of culture and language and the development of an oral tradition of storytelling (Antone, 2003; Archibald, 2008; Cajete, 1994; Cordoba, 2005; George, 2003; Paulsen, 2003; Weber-Pillwax, 2001). Cordoba (2005) suggested that "embracing literacy from a wholistic perspective requires that we understand education as a life-long process that re-affirms Aboriginal identities, cultures, and epistemologies" (p. 2). Indigenous epistemology is grounded in the idea of coming to know oneself through relationships with the land and environment (Ermine, 1995). The ways of knowing, or epistemology, and ways of being are communicated through story or objects. Both story and physical objects are artifacts that embody epistemology and ontology. Art and other cultural artifacts, as examples of Aboriginal literacies, symbolize culture and traditions. Cultural artifacts that were passed down had lives and stories of their own. Different owners altered some artifacts such as clothing as they were passed down, sold or traded; and these edits shifted or changed the story (Racette, 2004). Clothing as cultural artifacts

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can connect, evoke and trigger stories, identities and emotions while providing information about its creator (Racette, 2004). For example, Métis beadwork can be read as social text that fosters insight into the resourcefulness and strength of Métis women (Racette, 2004). Racette (2004) described dress and the decorative arts as objects with histories that become words in a story, because “they were created within the contexts of the lives of people who created, wore, and used them” (p. 15). Visual art is a way to communicate, and artifacts’ aesthetic properties bring people together (Racette, 2004). Art and cultural artifacts become another means of incorporating Aboriginal perspective into education while validating the knowledge and experiences of Aboriginal people. For example, Pahl and Rowsell (2010, p. 11) state that “merging artifacts with literacy offers a method of teaching and learning that opens up more space and understanding for students. Pahl and Rowsell commented that “some stories themselves are artifacts, told and retold over and over... Literacy is inscribed, written on the body, or made public in tactile and sensory ways for people to hear.” The stories, as artifacts, make culture tangible and gives students a resource to draw on to construct meaning. Pahl and Rowsell explained that “in telling stories about objects, the object becomes realized as material and sensual” (p. 11). Shayla’s stories as artifacts of her lived experiences helped to bring her culture into the classroom. In the following excerpt from my field notes, I transcribed a segment of a discourse with Shayla:

*The class is working on their letters and brochures as part of the Olympic bid and Shayla asked me to come over and help her with her writing. She had arrived late today and missed Ms. Reed modelling through a think-aloud and explaining the instructions for the literacy activity. Ms. Reed went over to Shayla’s home base and explained the literacy activity and what Shayla needed to do. Shayla continued to sit at her home base and did not engage in talk with Ms. Reed. She just stared toward the handout of paper lying on the table in front of her. She continued with this behaviour after Ms. Reed left to help another student. Ms. Reed called out several prompts to Shayla asking her to start writing. Shayla eventually acquiesced and then asked me to come over and help her. I pulled up a chair to her table and asked her ‘what do you want to write?’ Instead of talking about the literacy activity Shayla responded, ‘Do you know what? My mom braided my hair. She told me that she always had elastic and that what made her hair long. It is down to here’ [gestures with hand toward her thigh].*

Shayla’s hair became a storied artifact that carried her identity. She had shoulder-length black hair and considered the use of an elastic hair tie a means of having longer hair, as her mother did. The way that we choose to dress or wear our hair is part of our identity that demonstrates to others that we want to be seen as particular persons. Perhaps having her mom braid her hair and using an elastic hair tie was part of Shayla’s identity. This small artifact was a connec-

tion to family. If her hair was long like her mother's and she wore it in the same fashion, others would see her as belonging to her mother or as part of something. These artifacts made the students' experiences and knowledge a tangible object that they could evoke to construct meaning in their school literacy practices. The artifacts, or stories, connected the students' out-of-school lives to school literacy and affirmed their First Nations or Métis identity. For students to learn, their identities need to be recognized and acknowledged as worthwhile and valid (Moje & Lewis, 2007).

Aboriginal literacy scholars have begun to articulate the need to recognize Aboriginal perspectives in literacy learning (Hare, 2005; Laderoute, 2005, McKeough et al., 2008, Noll, 2000) and to validate the knowledge and experiences that youth bring to school and incorporate them into the classroom. Incorporating authentic literacy practices from their community and giving students spaces to socially engage in ways that are congruent with cultural or family practices are culturally responsive teaching methods. Culturally relevant or culturally responsive teaching involves applying the students' culture to their learning (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001). Understanding the importance of culture and community in education has led to opportunities for success for some minority children in school (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally relevant teaching strategies honor students' sense of self and humanity (Ladson-Billings, 1994). An example of this is in the research of Au and Mason (1981), who found that when a teacher used a familiar literacy practice from Hawaiian children's homes—that is, talk-story—the children were more involved in discussions and were able to make more inferences. Teachers in Hawaii's Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) utilize a discussion technique by which, after they ask a question, they do not call on one student to respond, but instead allow the children to collaborate to generate the answer. The teachers might paraphrase a child's response to keep the discussion on track, but the children control who speaks and when. This talk is similar to “a Hawaiian community speech event known as talk story... [in which] the participants engage in co-narration (i.e., they speak in rhythmic alternation to present a narrative to the group” (Au, 1997, p. 197). Including the collaborative and cooperative practices with which children are familiar is responsive to their cultural and language needs. Au explained that “when instruction is culturally responsive, students are not asked to reject the values of their home culture to experience academic success. Instead, teachers seek to adjust instruction to create learning situations that students will find comfortable” (p. 195). Au discovered that students are more engaged in academic content when their teachers use the talk-story-like participation structure.

Culturally relevant practices bring students' culture, language, and knowledge into the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ladson-Billings (2001) encouraged the use of culturally relevant practices in the classroom to bridge the divide between home and school. Children's language and culture “become a vehicle through which they acquire the official knowledge and skill of the school curriculum” (McKeough et al., 2008, p. 100). Children need to learn the language of school and school literacy to be successful in school. This entails

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schools' providing minority children with the "discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society" (Delpit, 1995, p. 29). Indigenous children need to be able to traverse between their out-of-school literacies and school literacies to be successful in school. Pahl and Rowsell (2010) argued that "multimodal has been proposed as a solution to bridging the gap between in-school and out-of-school literacies because multimodality lets in the visual and allows for a wider range of meaning-making systems" (p. 133). This use of multimodal and multiliteracies are culturally-responsive in that they allow for multiple ways of knowing to be represented in a variety of modes.

### **Conclusion**

Multiliteracies are at the forefront today because of the advances in technology; however, Indigenous people have belonged to multiliterate societies since time immemorial. First Nations, Métis and Inuit students are poised to use multiliteracies that they can bridge to school literacy. They help students to bring their own experiences, backgrounds and practices into the classroom and involve the multiple ways that meaning can be constructed and represented, thus honoring Indigenous epistemology. Indigenous epistemology is based on coming to know self through participation, collaboration and connection to a place environmentally, socially and spiritually (Cajete, 1994). Learning in Indigenous communities involves collaboration, the distribution of knowledge and experiential participation, which are also the hallmarks of new literacies. New literacies are the new texts and practices that have resulted from the use of technology. Multiliteracies make curriculum culturally responsive in that they acknowledge the value of many different literacies and literacy practices that children employ to construct and represent meaning. The use of multiliteracies helps students to bring their own experiences, backgrounds and practices into the classroom and highlights that different meanings are possible depending on the contexts, individuals, and cultures (New London Group, 1996, 2000). The students in the Grade 3 class that I studied drew on their funds of knowledge from their experiences with popular culture, artifactual literacies and their Indigenous cultures. The children in this research study participated in family and cultural activities that informed them of who they are in the larger society. The importance of family is clear in their stories, in their connections to texts and their view of themselves as First Nation or Métis children. Funds of knowledge include the out-of-school literacies that children learn by participating in their homes and communities. Their learning did not occur only in school, as evidenced by the many out-of-school experiences that they would bring into school literacy practices to help them to construct knowledge and make school literacy meaningful. Moll et al. (1992) asserted that when teachers learn about their students' funds of knowledge, they can bring them into the classroom and make authentic links between the children's home literacy and school literacy. The classroom teacher's ability to create spaces for her students to bring in their out-of-school literacy experiences supported literacy learning that was more en-

gaging and honored diverse ways of knowing. She created zones of possibilities for her students (Moll & Greenberg, 1990) in which they could draw on funds of knowledge that they bridged to the curriculum. Family stories as artifacts, Indigenous cultural knowledge and popular culture are funds of knowledge on which the children drew to make school literacy meaningful. The artifacts that the students brought into the classroom were stories that carried their identity and ways of seeing the world. To honor and validate the lived experiences and knowledge that students bring to the classroom, it is vital important to create spaces for students to use oral language, they must have opportunities to employ multiliteracies, and draw from their funds of knowledge.

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