

# “THIS IS FAR MORE COMPLEX THAN I COULD HAVE EVER IMAGINED”: STUDYING PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS’ SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS OF INDIGENEITY AND LITERACY

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## **Abstract**

This paper reports findings from a study examining pre-service teachers’ perceptions of Indigeneity and literacy in a literacy teacher education course. In 2015, the new British Columbia K-9 curriculum was implemented with a focus on integrating Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum in thoughtful and meaningful ways. This includes an emphasis on exploring the histories, experiences, values and knowledge associated with Indigenous ways of life (Deer, 2013, p. 177). As a result, teacher preparation programs have been called on to rethink the ways in which they prepare future teachers. Pre-service teachers were invited to write critical reflections following multiple curricular activities which aimed at bringing attention to Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing in a language arts context. The journal entries demonstrated that pre-service teachers developed broadened conceptions of literacy as a practice, refined their pedagogies, and demonstrated emerging confidence in integrating Indigenous perspectives into their future classrooms.

**Keywords:** literacy teacher education; critical stance; Indigenous perspectives in teacher education

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A pre-service student teacher reflects:

Twelve weeks ago, I probably thought literacy was just about reading something and then writing a reflection or summary. Now I see literacy is so much more than that. Indigenous culture, language, and views of learning can teach us a lot about the way we teach our students and how we can design our curriculum to meet the needs of all our students. To put students

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at the center and have learning revolve around them, not have it the other way around. I feel that through learning about Indigenous perspectives we will be able to engage our students in literacy through a different lens and in a more inclusive way. Why not act something out, learn through stories from older generations, learn from pictures and videos? (Paula, pre-service teacher)

This reflection is an example of what pre-service teachers contemplate as they engage in explorations of their developing practices and pedagogies in an era of reform. In 2015, the new British Columbia (BC, Canada) K-9 curriculum was implemented with a focus on integrating Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum in meaningful ways, including an emphasis of exploring histories, experiences, values and knowledge associated with Indigenous ways of life (Deer, 2013, p. 177). The new curriculum is designed to integrate more Indigenous content and culture for the purposes of immersing pupils in Indigenous perspectives from an early age and to develop a foundation of empathy and respect. This curriculum aligns with the 94 Calls to Action documented in the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. As a result, teacher preparation programs have been called on to rethink the ways in which they prepare future teachers. Pre-service teachers must be prepared to not only understand the new BC curriculum but to also engage with the curriculum in an authentic way.

Teachers and pre-service teachers in Canada remain a fairly homogeneous group (i.e., middle-class, White, women, and monolingual) while more than half of public school children are from racially and linguistically diverse backgrounds. While visible minorities make up over 40% of the general population, they only reflect 6.9% of the teaching force (Statistics Canada, 2018). Gambhir et al. (2007) report that a lack of racial diversity amongst teachers remains a challenge in the profession: “Recent survey data indicate that 70% of the school-aged population in Toronto is non-white yet the teaching population continues to be predominantly White” (Gambhir et al., 2008, p. 13). This means teachers and pre-service teachers must often develop a stance towards teaching and learning which foregrounds experiences and a worldview that may not reflect their own. To do so, scholars of teacher education have called on teacher education programs to design opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop a critical stance (Lewison, Leland, Harste, 2008). A critical stance is defined as a “deliberate choice made by educators,” which is a “lifelong and constant pursuit” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 28) in becoming critically literate. Such a stance helps educators locate themselves in the larger social system and “step outside of themselves” to develop critical literacies practices and pedagogies which aim to effectively teach all students.

Although there is no one approach to critical literacy, proponents of critical literacy see curriculum as “falsely neutral,” (Shor, 1987) which train students, perhaps inadvertently, to “observe things without judging”; “to see the world from the official consensus”; and “to carry out orders without questioning, as if the given society is fixed and fine” (p. 12). Critical literacy practices aim to disrupt the power imbalances inherent in institutions (i.e., schools), as they have the potential to reproduce (or disrupt) the status quo. Rogers (2014) expands on the potential of critical literacy practices in teacher education courses:

The intellectual work of designing critical literacy practices provides multiple learning opportunities for teachers to rethink traditional assumptions about literacy, learning, and the role of literacy education in

the lives of the children and families with whom they work. This is particularly important because part of teacher learning includes disrupting old patterns of thought and integrating new (p. 257).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Lewison et al.'s critical stance framework (2008) was used as a lens to inform the curricular experiences and analysis of the pre-service teachers' perceptions of learning. Lewison et al. (2008) identify four qualities of critical stance, including consciously engaging; entertaining alternate ways of being; taking responsibility to inquire; and being reflexive. Adopting a critical stance in teaching promotes critical consciousness and inquiry, as well as invites student reflexivity and action (Teemant, Leland, and Berghoff, 2014). Below the four qualities of critical stance are described. It must also be noted that the four qualities are cyclical and interrelated in nature, and thus, do not stand-alone.

*Consciously Engaging.* The first quality involves educators consciously engaging to develop a critical stance. Educators achieve this by monitoring their use and interpretation of language and actions to see how they maintain or disrupt the status quo (Kosnik, Dharamshi, Menna, Celovoulou, 2015). Deciding *how* to respond to events in the classroom is as important as responding to them (Lewison et al., 2008, p. 13).

*Entertaining Alternate Ways of Being.* This quality of a critical stance is described as “creating and trying on new discourses” (Lewison et al., 2008, p. 16). Entertaining alternate ways of being calls on educators to modify their teaching when they recognize what they believe about teaching, learning, and curriculum may not be working. This quality calls for “tension” to be used as a resource, which supports alternate ways of being. Viewing tension as a productive resource in the classroom helps pre-service teachers grapple with difficult issues and develop an appreciation for the complexity of teaching and learning.

*Taking Responsibility to Inquire.* The third quality of developing a critical stance involves the educators' responsibility to inquire. Inquiry, interrogation, and investigation need to be placed at the forefront when adopting this quality of a critical stance. Lewison et al. (2008) further elaborate on what it means for educators to take responsibility to inquire: “we push our beliefs out of their resting positions and engage in a cycle where new knowledge provokes new questions and where new questions generate new knowledge” (p.17).

*Being Reflexive.* The fourth quality educators must adopt and develop for a critical stance is being reflexive. This means, “being aware of our own complicity in maintaining the status quo or systems of injustice” (Lewison et al., 2008, p.18). Kamler (1999) further elaborates on this quality of a critical stance: “catching ourselves in incongruent and contradictory behavior is hopeful. It is a sign that we are engaged in the struggle of trying on new identities and discourses” (as cited in Lewison et al., 2008, p. 18). In turn, educators can “outgrow” themselves and problematize their conceptions of what *good teaching* looks like (p. 154).

As a self-identified settler, non-Indigenous teacher educator of colour, I felt it an ethical responsibility to engage with and address the new curriculum in my literacy methods course. As a researcher who has been involved in the inquiry into literacy education and teacher education through sociocultural lens, my research takes up notions of critical stance, critical literacy and culturally sustaining pedagogies in literacy teacher education settings. Using critical stance (Lewison et al, 2008) to enter the work of engaging with Indigenous education, while simultaneously preparing my pre-service teachers to do the same, was a natural starting point for me. Central questions which anchor my course

include: What is literacy?; Who counts as literate?; Who gets to decide? This inquiry into literacy through the lens of power and equity frame my course, and we as a class revisit and revise our understandings of literacy over the term. With aims to problematize knowledge, traditional literacies and teaching practices, this course was a clear place to build curricular experiences that infused Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Research exploring curricular integration among predominantly non-Indigenous/settler pre-service teachers has revealed challenges, including teachers' lack of knowledge, as well as issues with course cohesion and authenticity in curricular enactments (Kanu, 2005, p. 57). Consequently, teacher preparation programs have been called on to revisit ways in which they develop pre-service teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions towards teaching and learning which foregrounds an Indigenous worldview.

*Prior Knowledge.* Indigenous histories and perspectives have a history of being left out of the K-12 curriculum in Canada and consequently teacher preparation programs. As a result, in-service teachers do not have the adequate knowledge to teach the subject in a meaningful way (Mashford-Pringle & Nardozi, 2013; Blimkie, Vetter, & Haig-Brown, 2014). A lack of knowledge about Indigenous peoples has been identified in the literature as a significant reason for meaningful approaches to Indigeneity in the classroom to be left out (Kanu, 2005; Kanu, 2011; Mashford-Pringle & Nardozi, 2013). Insufficient understandings of Indigenous perspectives can prevent educators from assuming the necessary role of 'cultural brokers' in order to meaningfully integrate content and respond to possible cultural conflicts in the classroom (Kanu, 2011).

To better understand this challenge in the classroom context, we can draw on concepts highlighted by the cultural mismatch theory (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). Stephens et al. (2012) assert inequities are produced and reproduced when mainstream cultural norms do not align with norms prevalent in social groups which are represented in institutions, such as schools. When institutions promote mainstream norms, they inadvertently fuel inequality by creating barriers to the performance of underrepresented groups (p.1304). As mentioned earlier, teachers who represent a fairly homogenous (White, middle class, women) group are being asked to teach about histories perspectives they are not familiar with, and while they are promoting norms outside of their own experiences they must have the prior knowledge and perspectives necessary to do so.

In response to pre-service teachers' lack of knowledge, Madden (2015) suggests four "pedagogical pathways to engage Indigenous education with/in Faculties of Education" (p.1): Learning from Indigenous traditional models of teaching, Pedagogy for decolonizing, Indigenous and anti-racist education, and Indigenous and place-based education. To bridge the existing gaps in knowledge, several Canadian universities are implementing initiatives that aim to incorporate Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing into teacher education; however, the ways in which these initiatives are being conceptualized and integrated range in efficacy which are largely due to issues of authenticity and cohesion.

*Authenticity.* The importance of authenticity when incorporating Indigenous perspectives into the classroom is salient in the literature with respect not only to consulting with Indigenous people about history and pedagogy, but also in having Indigenous people participating in and teaching courses. Etherington (2015) outlines his experience teaching an Aboriginal Issues in Education course for preservice teachers at a

Canadian university. Being a non-Indigenous educator concerned with issues of authenticity, the author conducted extensive consultation regarding curriculum and pedagogy with several Indigenous educators with several sessions being taught alongside Indigenous educators. The author concludes that the presence and involvement of Indigenous people and pedagogies are vital to course delivery to challenge pervasive Eurocentric worldviews and perspectives. However, the feasibility of having Aboriginal knowledge keepers involved in curriculum design and course delivery must be taken into consideration given BC's new curriculum mandates. Findings from Milne (2017) show that Indigenous stakeholders see the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives to the curriculum as positive. To prevent stereotypical representations, Harrison and Greenfield (2011) suggest considering the relationship to place, a culture of collaboration between school and community, and transition to school programs for Indigenous children, in addition to being mindful about the way Indigenous people are being represented by the teacher and the language used in the classroom. Thus, authenticity can be achieved in multiple ways without overburdening Aboriginal educators.

*(Lack of) Cohesion and Confidence.* The knowledge necessary for teachers to successfully integrate Indigenous issues into their lessons is complex and needs to be a regular, ongoing part of teacher education programs. Harrison and Greenfield (2011) assert that immersion *throughout* teacher preparation programs will effectively equip pre-service teachers with the skills needed to authentically incorporate Indigenous perspectives to the curriculum. Although pre-service teachers often recognize the importance of bringing Indigenous perspectives to the classroom, insufficient knowledge of Indigenous themes, lack of Indigenous learning resources and support from schools, and incompatibility between school practices and Indigenous values result in incoherent approaches (Kanu, 2011). Initiatives such as Mashford-Pringle and Nardozi's (2013) series of workshops designed to increase preservice teachers' knowledge about Indigenous history and culture in a Canadian university, do not always equip pre-service teachers to meaningfully incorporate these perspectives to their classrooms. Although most participants in Mashford-Pringle and Nardozi's (2013) study reported a better understanding of Indigenous issues after the workshops, many did not feel confident in teaching about Indigenous issues.

A more holistic approach to integration of Indigenous knowledges in teacher education programs is found in Blimkie et al.'s (2014) study, which explores pre-service teachers' experiences with an initiative that aimed at "infusing Aboriginal content and pedagogies in each of the required education courses and placements" (p.48) in a university in Ontario, Canada. Pre-service teachers reported having developed a better understanding of how to teach Indigenous content and a desire to move away from an "add on" approach by *infusing* instead of *including* Indigenous content.

Despite initiatives to integrate Indigenous issues into teacher education programs (Blimkie et al, 2014; Kanu, 2011; Madden, 2015; Mashford-Pringle and Nardozi, 2013), there remains little research exploring pre-service teachers' experiences with Indigenous perspectives in literacy methods courses. This study proposes to address this gap in research. This paper reports on the experiences of pre-service teachers in a language arts methods course in which Indigenous perspectives were infused throughout.

*Multidisciplinary shifts in literacy.* The field of literacy research has seen significant multidisciplinary shifts in the past several decades (Brass, 2015). Literacy, a practice which was once synonymous with the discrete and autonomous skills of simply reading and writing, is now increasingly understood as a complex social practice in which historical,

cultural, and social perspectives are at the center (Brass, 2015). Interdisciplinary fields of study have emerged which reflect these significant shifts of how literacy is conceptualized today, including new literacy studies, multiliteracies, and critical literacy studies. There have been pedagogical implications which consider the various ways in which one makes meaning and aims for practices that promote equity in classrooms, including multimodal pedagogies, culturally sustaining pedagogies, and critical literacy pedagogies. This “social turn” seen in the field of literacy highlights the potential for literacy teaching and learning to be transformative and promote social action. These shifts have been slow, however, to reach educational settings.

In Hare’s study (2012) of contributions of Indigenous knowledge to young Indigenous children’s literacy learning, findings revealed that a greater set of literacy activities were present in Indigenous families than were recognized by early learning settings. There was a literacy orientation within Indigenous knowledge systems that centered on oral tradition, land-based experiences and ceremonial practices. These practices, however, are not ones traditionally associated with literacy teaching and learning. Hare (2017) reminds us: “Given the increasing presence of reconciliation in teacher education inspired by Calls-to-Action that bear directly on teacher responsibilities, we need to bring the concept of reconciliation into dialogue with the policies, practices, and programs that shape our work with educators” (p. 1). These often-unrecognized literacy practices are what Moll et al.’s (1992) describe as “funds of knowledge.” These knowledges and ways of knowing are “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133). Viewing students’ literacy practices from this additive perspective, teachers understand that students bring with them “funds of knowledge” from their homes and communities that can be used for concept and skill development, as well as inform teachers culturally mediated and responsive pedagogy.

### **Methods, Techniques and Modes of Inquiry**

A qualitative methodology approach allowed for in-depth exploration of the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of literacy and Indigeneity, which suited the purposes of this research. As noted earlier, there is a limited body of research on pre-service teachers’ perceptions of and familiarity with Indigenous perspectives connected with literacy classroom practices. Although the research in the area of critical stance is considerable, the theoretical foundation on which to base this research was lacking. For these reasons, a modified grounded theory approach was used. The understanding of grounded theory is based in the work of Strauss and Corbin (2000) and Bryant and Charmaz (2007) who note that the primary purpose of the grounded theory approach is to generate theory from data rather than verify theory from data. A modified grounded theory approach was appropriate for the study, as an existing framework of critical stance was used to analyze data collected.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of journal entries from the course, as well as a pre- and-post written reflection. In order to offer pre-service teachers opportunities for reflection on their own learning and thinking and to collect feedback, they were asked to write reflective responses after specific learning experiences over the course of the term. These responses offered rich information on pre-service teachers’ growing understanding of their work as literacy educators considering the new BC curriculum. The journal entries were critical reflections in which students had to respond an aspect of the session that resonated with

them using the reflection framework of What? So What? Now What? (Brookfield, 1995). This paper, however, will focus only on the pre- and post-journal prompts as it will allow for an in-depth exploration of the shifting perceptions of pre-service teachers understanding of literacy and Indigeneity. The pre- and post-written reflections responded to the prompt “What is the connection between literacy and Indigeneity?” The pre-journal prompt was administered at the end of the first session. Students were given 20 minutes to write their responses. The pre-journal prompts were administered week 12 of the course. Students were given 20 minutes to write their responses. It should be noted, during the post-journal reflection, several students asked for additional time, so extra time was granted until everyone felt ready to turn reflections in. These responses were informed by the curricular experiences and were often referenced in the post journal reflections.

### **Curricular Experiences**

The intention for this study was to disrupt Eurocentric ways of knowing and centre Indigenous perspectives in my teaching of a course entitled, *Designs for Learning: Elementary Language Arts* with the input and consultation from Indigenous colleagues both staff and faculty. This was a required course for pre-service teachers who were part of a 12-month teacher preparation program at my higher education institution in British Columbia, Canada. In the Summer 2017 term I was the lead instructor for this course. The study included all 31 pre-service teachers who were registered for the course. At the time of the course, approximately half pre-service teachers all had one practice teaching placement, while the other half had completed their second practice teaching placement. An overview of the pre-service teachers' race and gender is detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Overview of race and gender of pre-service teachers**

Pre-Service Teacher Demographics (n=31)	
Gender	Female= 28; Male= 3
Racial Background	White= 21 South Asian= 5; South-East Asian= 5

The course was centered around notions of critical literacy, and understanding literacy as a social practice to take up and respond to issues of race, class, and power, focusing on understandings of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1972), critical literacy practices (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008), new literacies (Street, 1984) and recognizing out of school literacy practices (Moll, 1992). In addition, to bring attention to Indigenous perspectives and ways of being I worked to design and implement three curricular components into my course which were informed by ongoing conversations and consultations with Indigenous colleagues and the critical stance framework. Indigenous colleagues were consulted before and during the course to recommend course readings, guest speakers, as well as provide informal feedback on in-class activities. Below the curricular experiences are described in detail.

*Readings of scholarly articles on Indigenous education.* In the course syllabus, throughout the term I included six peer-reviewed journal articles on topics related to Indigeneity by Indigenous scholars, including: Indigenous identity in educational settings,

integrating Indigenous knowledge in the K-8 curriculum, and decolonizing the K-8 curriculum. The list of the six scholarly journal readings are included in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Six peer-reviewed journal articles on aspects of Indigenous education included in the literacy methods course**

Author	Article Title	Journal	Date of Publication
Battiste, M., & Youngblood Henderson, James	Naturalizing Indigenous knowledge in Eurocentric education	Canadian Journal of Native Education	2009
Brayboy, B., & Maughn, E.	Indigenous Knowledges and the Story of the Bean	Harvard Educational Review	2009
Francis, N, Reyhner, JA	Language and Literacy Teaching for Indigenous Education: A Bilingual Approach	Multilingual Matters	2002
Hare, J.	'They tell a story and there's meaning behind that story': Indigenous knowledge and young indigenous children's literacy learning.	Journal of Early Childhood	2012
Shay, M., & Wickes, J.	Aboriginal identity in education settings: Privileging our stories as a way of deconstructing the past and re-imagining the future	Literacy The Australian Association for Research in Education	2017
Sium, A., & Ritskes, E.	Speaking truth to power: Indigenous storytelling as an act of living resistance	Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society	2013

*Critical Reading of Music Album "We are the Halluci Nation" (Tribe Called Red).* Over two sessions pre-service teachers engaged in a critical "reading" of the musical album entitled *We are the Halluci Nation* by A Tribe Called Red. The album is a collaborative effort including artists/activists from around the world, which is centered around the effects of colonialism and highlight possible ways forward towards reconciliation. Our work with this album included a group listening and critical round table dialogue. This was followed by multimodal responses to the album, in which pre-service teachers demonstrated learnings and connections to other course concepts. Responses included poetry pieces,

recorded podcasts making pedagogical connections to the album, illustrations which communicated emotional responses to the album, and “author” investigations.

*Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Guest Speakers.* A Knowledge Keeper and Indigenous scholar was invited to come and guest lecture on two separate occasions. The Knowledge Keeper was recommended by Indigenous faculty at my institution. The speaker’s scholarship focused on the use of autobiographical and narrative writing to engage in the writing process and to explore identities, which are key competencies in the new BC curriculum.

### **Data Analysis**

For data analysis, the journal transcripts were read line by line several times. A systematic approach to data analysis was followed, employing practices of continuous coding. The first level of analysis, “open coding,” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61) was used to examine properties of the data (Creswell & Miller, 2000) by identifying salient words and phrases, relating to the research questions and any other category or theme, which were emerging. With each round of analysis new codes were added, merged, and collapsed. As the study continued, I engaged in “axial coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.96), using the analytic principle of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Making connections between the core categories, themes were determined. For example, I generated the axial code “making connections between personal and professional experiences to understand Indigeneity through literacy.” A common set of categories were created for each of the three cases which encompass the main findings in the study (uncertainty to confidence; broadening conceptions of literacy; refining pedagogies; and constructing future plans). Throughout the data collection and analysis period, the codes were frequently revisited for clarification, continuing to add, delete, modify, and establish themes.

### **Results and Findings**

After analyzing the pre-and post-journal entries, there were strong indications that students had developed a perceived depth of understanding demonstrated by the connections they made to their personal and professional lives. Their deepening understandings were evidenced through their shift from uncertainty to emerging confidence, broadening conceptions of literacy, and developing a plan of action for their future classrooms. Below these themes are explored via pre-service teachers’ perceptions. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

#### ***Broadening Conceptions of Literacy***

In their journal entries, pre-service teachers began to consider the larger social and cultural contexts in which literacy practices occur. As a result, they began to develop notions of literacy as “a set of contextualized practices” (Gee, 2000, p.101). Although several students had arrived to the course with a sense that literacy was “more than just reading and writing”(Helen), it was clear in their entries that they developed deeper understandings of literacy in relation to sociocultural contexts. These relationships could be categorized as literacy as multimodal and multimediated; literacy as a family and a community practice; and storytelling as a literacy event.

*Literacy beyond reading and writing.* By making connections to the instructional components, as well as course content presented throughout the term students arrived at expansive understandings of literacy, which included multiple literacies, multimodal and multimediated understandings of literacy. Mary, for example, noted: “Through my

experiences in this class I have realized that literacy is more than just reading and writing. Literacy includes reading, writing, music, artwork, experiences, culture, etc.” While Helen, who previously understood literacy as “more than reading and writing” described her growing understanding of literacy in her post- journal as a meaning making practice which involves systems of representation:

Literacy is knowing and understanding your environment through language, symbols and representations beyond just words; beyond just reading and writing. I would even venture that it’s about knowing yourself and what you are about; what your values are and what matters most to you. This knowing helps you to make sense of your experiences to manifest a deeper connection to your surroundings; the people, things and events in your life.

Some students drew on the in-class exercise of critically reading a music album to help them arrive at new understandings. Students identified the importance of using “alternative” and “non-traditional” texts to make meaning as well as engage diverse learners in their own future practice. Mary wrote: “the album that we listened to from A Tribe Called Red showed the rich culture and history of the Indigenous people through an alternative form of literacy that incorporated written word, spoken word, and music.” Recognizing the music album as a form of storytelling, Mary noted: “Oral storytelling is not a form of reading or writing but it is still an important part of literacy because it tells rich stories of the Indigenous culture.”

By using alternative texts (critical stance framework), students saw and experienced how learning was experienced in multimodal ways, and how various systems of representation added to the meaning making process. For example, several students recognized the rich literacy practices seen in both historical and contemporary Indigenous communities:

I now view it as the things we see and view or hear in the world, such as having multimodal texts. In relation to Indigeneity, I think it is like sharing oral stories, pictorial works of art, carvings, that are shared with others is all a form of literacy. Indigenous knowledge in whichever form it is, is literacy. Any discourse on a certain subject or topic is literacy. (Aisha)

Recognizing literacy as multimodal and multimediated helped student teachers refine their thinking in regard to questions such as “what counts as literacy?”

*Literacy as a family and community practice.* Several students came to view literacy as inextricably linked to context. In their post journal entries, 12 students cited “place” as an important aspect of literacy where this term was not found at all in pre-journal entries. The notion of “place” was introduced and integrated throughout the course through land-based activities, outdoor reflections, ties to ecological justice, and readings on place-based knowledge. In her pre-journal entry, Denise made a link to place by citing nature as an important aspect, noting: “How I view this relationship is that literacy is knowledge about something specific and Indigeneity is something that has great respect for the natural world.” In her post-journal entry, Denise demonstrated understanding literacy as inherently tied to Indigeneity by responding:

Place-based knowledge is so important to identify and value... This has strong ties to Indigenous beliefs, but also to the idea of local literacies, which we've worked with over the past 12 weeks. This ties into the natural world, and place based learning. There is an aspect of nature as literacy that we are seeing a shift towards with the new curriculum. This is where Indigenous knowledge and ways of learning creates opportunities for place-based learning.

Further, students articulated the importance of recognizing and valuing "out-of-school" literacy practices and "community literacy practices" in their teaching. Jennifer, much like the other 12 students made connections between course concepts, place, and literacy: "The article by Bausch (2003) illustrates this relationship when she discusses her realization that literacy is present everywhere, in billboards, recipe cards and conversations. Literacy is everywhere and it is deeply connected to place and context."

Connected to place, students made mention of the role family and community play in the construction of literacy practices. Specifically, they described the significance of identifying the expertise and rich knowledge present in "inter-generational" and "multi-generational" settings. Rachel said:

The first part that makes up the relationship between Indigeneity and Literacy is that of the role that families play when their children are growing up and learning about the world around them. There is a huge importance on the multi-generational roles of Indigenous Peoples that help to teach their children.

In this reflection, the pre-service teacher's response provides an alternative to what was found in Hare's (2012) study. Hare (2012) found teachers often did not recognize Indigenous children's varied literacy practices, which occurred at home and in the community. Pre-service teachers such as Rachel demonstrated a move towards an asset-based perspective, which recognizes and values students "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992). Similarly, Anna described what out-of-school literacy meant to her, while considering the role these practices plays in communities and families:

Many people learn by doing or listening or watching. These types of learning have no boundaries, no age range. The purpose and results can be immediate or latent, but either way the learning is ongoing and ultimately is tied to the self, family, and community.

Finally, in their post- journal entries, pre-service teachers shared insights they gained about the ways in which they made connections with their own environments and "re-read" these spaces in new ways. Emily drew on a familiar landscape to understand the relationship between literacy and Indigeneity:

Indigeneity can be shown through the lens of the land - it does not have to be expressed through anything else as reinforcement, for it to make sense. A picture frozen in time which shows young children fishing for sturgeon in the Fraser River can in itself be a piece of literacy. Symbolism, or traditional pieces of clothing, traditional colors worn by Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples can be a form of literacy, also.

*Literacy as a storytelling event.* The pre-service teachers understood the importance of recognizing and celebrating storytelling as a literacy practice. In their pre-journal entries, 23 students explicitly noted ‘storytelling’ as a practice which tied literacy and Indigeneity together; however, they did not expand on this connection with any examples or personal experiences. In their post journal entries, the pre-service teachers developed a more complex understanding of Storytelling. For example, several initially viewed storytelling as an ‘easy’ way to integrate Indigenous perspectives into courses but realized more complicated after all, noting there were protocols and procedures around storytelling and noting that “not all stories are meant to be shared with everyone” (Jade).

Some participants elaborated on the idea of transmission of knowledge (A model of practice that views education as a specific body of knowledge that is transmitted from the teacher to the student) to include a broader understanding of storytelling as one of the many manifestations of the connection between Indigeneity and literacy. For example, in the pre-journal entry, one student expressed uncertainty when expressing their understanding of the relationship between Indigeneity and literacy:

I think that storytelling bridges the relationship between Indigeneity and literacy and is now allowing for a gap to be filled in the curriculum in that teachers can use stories to express that relationship. Other than that, I don’t really think that I know much, but I am eager to learn (Lisa).

However, the same participant demonstrated a much deeper understanding of the connections between Indigeneity and literacy making connections to the First Peoples Principles of Learning and considering their developing pedagogy:

I think to strictly label something as being specifically an Indigenous literacy is not what Indigenous ways of thinking and learning is all about. I think that the whole purpose of amalgamating the two is so that we can take the First People’s Principles of Learning and incorporate that into how we think about literacy and how we teach literacy. So maybe then the relationship between Indigeneity and literacy is more about how you incorporate literacy and conceptualize literacy in the classroom. (Lisa)

### ***From Uncertainty to Emerging Confidence***

In general, participants demonstrated in their post journal entries an emerging confidence with knowledge and practices which would help them meaningfully integrate Indigenous perspectives into their future classrooms. This was demonstrated through journal entries which made deep connections to theory, as well as reimagining past experiences with their new knowledge and understandings. In addition, their journal entries were substantially longer and included meaningful connections to their personal and professional lives.

In the beginning of the course, 11 participants explicitly reported feeling uncertain about the relationship between Indigeneity and literacy. Some of their responses included: “Not exactly sure how to explain” (Jasmine); “don’t really know where to start” (Paula); and “At this point I don’t know how to answer” (Marco). However, only two of participants explicitly expressed uncertainty at the end of the course. An overall broader understanding of the connections between literacy and Indigeneity was evident when comparing

participants' pre-and post-journal entries. In addition to deeper and more elaborate responses in post journals, several participants explicitly reported having gained a new perspective throughout the course. Rose referred to her experience in the course as “transformative”, and expanded on what she learned by saying: “now I think the link between literacy and Indigenous views is clearer”; Carol said the knowledge she was exposed to “opened [her] eyes to the deeper and more powerful ways of knowing.” This increased feeling of confidence at the end of the course can be associated with a shift in understanding Indigeneity from a pedagogical perspective as a result of the curricular experiences. Though all students were introduced to the First Peoples Principles of Learning in previous semesters, Lisa was able to make connections to this by drawing on her curricular experiences/course content demonstrating her growing confidence. Lisa's journal entry illustrates the importance of a cohesive, holistic approach when integrating Indigenous perspectives to teacher training courses (Blimkie et al., 2014).

Although there appeared to be more confidence in participants' answers, several participants (13) recognized the complexity of the issue. This lack of clarity, however, was often met with an appreciation for being immersed in complex professional dialogue. This aligns with Christensen's (2000) description of the practice of critical educators' work as “ongoing” “complex” “big” and often “messy.” An example of this can be seen in Jennifer's post-response:

I think there is still progress to be made but I am excited to see that there are more ways to combine Indigenous principles, ways of knowing and learning than I thought initially. This idea of connecting literacy to more than just reading and writing opens up endless possibilities and increases what I thought I knew in the beginning to what I know now.

Esther's articulation of her shifting perceptions demonstrated deeper understandings and willingness to grapple with the complexity of the practices. She noted: “this is far more complex than I could have ever imagined.” This sentiment reflects the feelings communicated by most students during the semester through both formal and informal correspondences (e.g., written reflections, small group discussions, Informal conversations after/before class). Despite the complexity and the “endless possibilities” discovered in the course, the majority of participants communicated a perceived sense of increased comfort with the nature of the work. This was seen clearly in their articulations of a revised and reimagined pedagogy.

### **Revisiting and Reimagining their Pedagogy**

*Refined stance towards teaching.* The theme of pedagogy as a stance towards teaching and learning emerged as key learning in making connections between literacy and Indigeneity. Participants understood the importance of having Indigenous knowledge “holistically” (Emma), “organically” (Neha) “embedded into the way we teach students [about] everything in general” (Aisha). Mark felt “the relationship between Indigeneity and literacy is found within the way you teach. It is the approach and way in which educators practice.”

In their journal entries, pre-service teachers commented on approaching the integration of Indigenous perspectives into their classrooms by examining and refining their pedagogies. Five students made explicit mention of moving away from a “check-box”

approach to teaching Indigenous perspectives: “I don’t want anything to be forced or seem forced, because then I am just “checking a box” (Julia). Abigail commented:

In the past I have seen First Nations art incorporated many times, but that was often the extent of First Nations education and I feel like it was often done in an inauthentic way. It was simply to check off a box that it has been included.

Pre-service teachers instead focused on holistic integrations of Indigeneity into a language arts classroom. Jade wrote about her gained confidence: “I no longer feel the need to explicitly justify why I would want to incorporate storytelling, sharing circles, or anything related to Indigenous knowledge...This is seen in the ways we speak, dress, and behave in certain contexts.” On a similar note, participants described embodying Indigenous knowledge: “an effective way of teaching Indigenous is to practice the methods of teaching and learning in a holistic way that teaches students valuable lessons such as patience, community, identity, and many others” (Isabella). This new understanding of pedagogy grounded in Indigeneity represents a more cohesive approach in which participants began to move away from an “add-on” approach towards more fluid and inclusive ways of integrating Aboriginal knowledge to their future practices.

In pre-journals, many pre-service teachers who wrote about incorporating Indigenous perspectives into their future classrooms focused mainly on the use of storytelling. However, in their post journals participants were able to identify many other elements that could be used to represent Indigeneity. This further demonstrated their deepened understanding of literacy, language arts and what many described as an inextricable connection to Indigeneity. Participants’ plans to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into their future classrooms can be categorized into three themes: developing authentic practices and focusing on experiential and multimodal approaches.

*Developing authentic practices.* Several participants described ways in which they planned to address issues of inauthenticity in their future classrooms. As a way of drawing in multiple perspectives and honoring Indigenous worldviews, 12 participants considered inviting in Indigenous elders. Nine participants explicitly described the importance of text selection. Carefully selecting texts, both print and non-print were also seen as an important practice in their developing pedagogy. Further, the importance of honesty and transparency in the classroom in regard to knowledge about Aboriginal perspectives was mentioned by eight participants as a way of fighting the uncertainties that remained about the content. Julia commented:

For my classroom, I view the relationship between Indigeneity and literacy as a seamless one. I want to work with my students through the First Peoples Principles of Learning, bringing in different types of literacy and letting the students know that I am a learner too. Letting the students know how I am learning just like them, will help me feel like I don’t always need to be an expert and I won’t always know everything, especially when diving into such heavy topics.

*Experiential and multimodal approaches.* Several pre-service teachers described modifying lessons we did for their own future classrooms. For example, eight students

indicated they intended to incorporate the exercise of critically reading of A Tribe Called Red album in their own classroom. Lisa said:

I want to work on my skills of adding different forms of literacy into the class, especially with music. I think music can be such a great connector between these two things. I still remember so clearly the lesson we had in this class about the A Tribe Called Red lyrics and just reading through them and listening to the music and having such an impactful time that could connect to students of all ages.

Other students described the stance from which they would approach teaching and learning in their own classrooms. Alice, for example, talked about multimodal project as a way of bringing multiple perspectives to the classroom: “Through multiple lenses, I believe that students are able to better grasp the world and what it has to offer, though different stories, not just one (their own)”.

Some students described their roles as educators through a lens of facilitation and being a cultural broker (Kanu, 2011). Emma, for example, shared:

I would consider the cultural background of all my students (and myself) and how this comes into play in the classroom setting. Do we share a common language and understanding of the world we exist in, and can I bridge that gap for myself as a teacher, and help my students begin to understand a different perspective (or alternate literacy), or understand there are multiple lenses to view the world through, and that the ability to do this is critically important as they (students) learn more and experience more?”

## **Discussion**

Exploring the role of literacy teacher education in reconciliation, this study aimed to explore pre-service teachers' shifting perceptions of Indigeneity and literacy in a literacy teacher education methods course. By exploring Indigeneity through a language arts lens, pre-service teachers were invited to participate in interconnected curricular experiences which aimed to have pre-service teachers re-conceptualize literacy as a transformative practice that could support the path towards reconciliation. By integrating academic readings and non-print texts, as well as inviting Indigenous Knowledge Keepers into the course, pre-service teachers began to shift their views on what counted as literacy and began understanding Indigeneity in new ways as related to history, perspectives, and pedagogy.

Several pre-service teachers made connections between the observed inequities in literacy teaching and learning and their future responsibilities as literacy educators. They described in their post journal entries ways to meaningfully integrate Indigenous histories and perspectives into their classrooms. Further, pre-service teachers reported broadened conceptions of literacy. They began to consider the larger social and cultural contexts in which literacy practices occur and began to develop notions of literacy as “a set of contextualized practices” (Gee, 2000). Although several students arrived to the course with a sense that literacy was “more than just reading and writing” it was clear from their entries that they developed nuanced views in relation to context, including literacy as multimodal; literacy as a family and community practice; and storytelling as a literacy event. Through

their reflections, pre-service teachers revisited and refined their own pedagogy. This was seen through an evolving stance towards integrating Indigenous content and perspectives in their future classrooms. Student teachers described the importance of “holistic”, “organic” and “authentic” approaches when teaching and made significant distinctions between approaches which “embedded” content rather than an “add-on” or “check-list” approach.

Similar to findings in the academic literature, participants were initially concerned with their perceived lack of knowledge and doubted their abilities to facilitate authentic ways of representing Indigenous perspectives in their future classrooms (Mashford-Pringle & Nardozi, 2013; Blimkie, Vetter, & Haig-Brown, 2014). Indigenous histories, perspectives and pedagogies were integrated into the course through meaningful connections with the literacy curriculum (e.g., narrative, critical media literacy, poetry). Interconnections to Indigeneity were present in each session rather than one or two topics dedicated to Indigenous issues, as is often the case in teacher education programs (Kanu, 2011). It is clear from the data gathered in this project that infusing (Blimkie et al., 2014) Indigenous perspectives into the course rather than simply including Indigenous perspectives in an add-on approach eased student teachers into this complex work in an authentic way.

Select findings, however, from this study were divergent from existing academic literature. Pre-service teachers were not overtly resistant to the work. Although pre-service teachers may have been resistant, they would not necessarily have expressed these feelings to the class or course instructor. Since pre-service teachers were not overtly resistant, this informed the curricular experiences which were created. The content and ideas were generally met with curiosity and optimism. Scholarship which has studied the integration of Indigenous perspectives has revealed that resistance is a significant hurdle to overcome when preparing pre-service teachers to incorporate Indigenous issues into their teaching practice (Pearson & Nakata, 2009). Further, pre-service teachers in this study were more optimistic at the end of the term than at the beginning of the term which again did align with the academic literature (Pearson & Nakata, 2009). This, of course, may not be the experience of all teacher educators doing this work. Students attitudes and disposition may be a result of being immersed in a teacher preparation program and faculty of education which have aligned priorities of equity and reconciliation.

This study which focused on meaningfully integrating Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing in a language arts context provides insight into the work of reconciliation in teacher education. While many studies have adopted initiatives to raise awareness and develop skills to meet the calls to action outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, most have been carried out in isolation without connection to other content areas. Literature has focused on overall Indigenous integration separate from a content discipline area (e.g., science, language arts, math). By exploring Indigeneity and ways of knowing through a language arts lens, pre-service teachers were able to develop a depth of understanding and move towards clarity with practical examples and tangible experiences in which to root their growing skills, dispositions, and knowledge of what it means to integrate Indigenous perspectives into classrooms. Consulting with Indigenous faculty and staff, as well as using a framework of critical stance (Lewison et al., 2008) served as a useful starting point from which to develop curricular experiences.

### **Significance and Conclusion**

The implications of this study speak not only to the work of literacy teacher educators but all teacher educators as well as those who support and guide their work at the institution. The implications and recommendations that arise from this work can be

categorized into two categories: teacher educators work with pre-service teachers and teacher education programs supporting the integration of Indigenous perspectives. A key finding from this study revealed that pre-service teachers were able to “make sense,” “gain clarity,” and “feel more confident” about integrating Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing into their practice because it was presented within a discipline area (in this case language arts). Literacy is an evolving practice that should reflect the shifts and priorities in contemporary cultures and societies. Literacy teacher educators should carefully and deliberately select a wide and expansive range of texts in their courses that complicate traditional understandings of literacy as autonomous skills such as reading and writing. The selection of Indigenous texts should be a collaborative practice alongside Indigenous faculty and staff to ensure approved and appropriate texts are included. The pre-service teachers in this study demonstrated new understandings of literacy and Indigeneity when they engaged and reflected on their experiences with alternative texts (i.e., music), Knowledge Keepers and academic readings that included the voices of those usually outside of the mainstream. The activities helped them to question What counts as literacy? Whose knowledge counts? and Who gets to decide? As a result, pre-service teachers began to see literacy as a sociocultural practice that happens both in and out of schools. Incorporating alternative texts into teacher education courses will help pre-service teachers broaden their conceptions of literacy while demonstrating that there are multiple ways in which to be literate.

Further, it is important to consider the institutions role in supporting and encouraging faculty to meaningfully engage in this work. Given the shifts in curriculum, we are asking teacher educators to teach in a way they have never taught in the past. By immersing pre-service teachers in Indigenous practices and pedagogies in *all* of their teacher education courses, helps them to bridge theory and practice and develop strategies for enactment in their own future classrooms (Harrison and Greenfield, 2011). It is important that pre-service teachers have opportunities to grapple with these ideas at different points of the program and through the lens of various content areas. This way pre-service teachers can engage in recursive practices of action and reflection and develop deeper interdisciplinary understandings across courses. Perhaps teacher education programs should prepare teacher educators to create meaningful connections between Indigeneity and their content area, as well as across content areas. This could look like professional development workshops, collaborative course planning time, team teaching, and course observation time. Encouraging teacher educators to study their own practice would help them study a site that is familiar to them in many ways, while exploring new practices. Further, if several teacher educators were involved in inquiries into their practice, it may lead to a community of practice in which teacher educators could discuss their work and develop a repertoire of teacher education beyond their own experiences.

Returning to Madden (2015) who noted, “teacher educators are involved in the doubled task of modelling what it might mean to engage Indigenous education, while preparing teachers to carry on similar work differently in schools” (p. 13) this study informed ongoing learnings as pre-service teachers grappled with the relationships between and among Indigeneity, literacy, and teaching. We must rethink the instructional approaches used to support pre-service teachers as they become civic-minded members of our society. The theoretical frameworks of critical stance (Lewison et al. 2008) speak to this shift and may serve as a starting point to cultivate pre-service teachers’ growth as change agents, cultural brokers, and curriculum designers. While the work and framework of critical stance can serve as a starting point for literacy educators and teacher educators,

more work must be done with Indigenous colleagues and community stakeholders to co-construct critical frameworks that consider the histories and varied perspectives of Indigenous peoples.

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