

**Katia Hildebrandt, Patrick Lewis, Claire Kreuger, Joseph Naytowhow, Jennifer Tupper, Alec Couros, Ken Montgomery**

## **Digital Storytelling for Historical Understanding: Treaty Education for Reconciliation**

This paper presents the findings of a research project that sought to interrogate the possibilities of digital storytelling as a pathway towards a more complete understanding of treaties and the treaty relationship in western Canada. This research is situated in the province of Saskatchewan, where treaty education (that is, education about the history of the numbered treaties signed between First Nations people and the British Crown, as well as the subsequent history of the treaty relationship) has been mandatory for almost a decade.

The paper details a two-year journey alongside elementary educators as they used digital storytelling to take up treaty education in their classrooms. We present an overview of the research project as well as the narratives of a teacher, a researcher, and a Cree knowledge keeper, all of whom were involved in and reflected on the research journey. We consider the research findings alongside these narratives in order to explore the possibilities that digital storytelling might offer as we, as a Canadian nation, move towards reconciliation with Aboriginal people within a Canadian context of ongoing colonialism.

Questo articolo presenta i risultati di un progetto di ricerca che ha cercato di indagare sulle possibilità della narrazione digitale di storie (storytelling) come percorso verso una comprensione più completa dei trattati e del rapporto fra i trattati nel Canada occidentale. Questa indagine è situata nella provincia di Saskatchewan, dove l'istruzione sui trattati (cioè, l'educazione sulla storia dei trattati numerati firmati tra la Prima Nazione e la Corona Britannica, così come la storia successiva del rapporto fra i trattati) è stato obbligatorio per quasi un decennio.

Il saggio riporta un percorso di due anni con insegnanti di scuola elementare che hanno usato lo storytelling digitale per fare l'educazione ai trattati nelle loro classi. Presentiamo una panoramica del progetto di ricerca ed i racconti di un insegnante, di un ricercatore, e un guardiano Cree della conoscenza, i quali sono stati coinvolti nella ricerca e riflettono sul percorso svolto. Consideriamo i risultati dell'indagine insieme a questi racconti, al fine di esplorare le possibilità che la narrazione digitale potrebbe offrire dato che noi, come nazione canadese, procediamo verso la riconciliazione con gli aborigeni in un contesto canadese di colonialismo in corso.

*Katia Hildebrandt* is a PhD Candidate and instructor at the University of Regina. Email:

[Katia.hildebrandt@alumni.utoronto.ca](mailto:Katia.hildebrandt@alumni.utoronto.ca)

*Dr. Patrick Lewis* is a storyteller-teacher-researcher. He taught primary and elementary children for 18 years. Email: [Patrick.Lewis@uregina.ca](mailto:Patrick.Lewis@uregina.ca)

*Claire Kreuger* is a teacher at a French Immersion school in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan and Master-candidate in Education at the University of Regina. Email: [Kreuger.claire@prairiesouth.ca](mailto:Kreuger.claire@prairiesouth.ca)

*Joseph Naytowhow* is a Plains/Woodland Cree (Nehiyaw) singer/songwriter, storyteller, and knowledge-keeper from the Sturgeon Lake First Nation Band in Saskatchewan. Email: [Jnaytow1@sasktel.net](mailto:Jnaytow1@sasktel.net)

*Dr. Jennifer Tupper* is Dean in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. Email: [Jennifer.tupper@uregina.ca](mailto:Jennifer.tupper@uregina.ca)

*Dr. Alec Couros* teaches Educational Technology and Media in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. Email: [couros@gmail.com](mailto:couros@gmail.com)

*Dr. Ken Montgomery* is Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Programs, in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina.

Email: [Ken.Montgomery@uregina.ca](mailto:Ken.Montgomery@uregina.ca)

Postal address (for all authors): Faculty of Education, University of Regina, 3737 Wascana Pkwy, Regina, SK, S4S0A

### **Keywords:**

Treaty education, digital storytelling, Aboriginal, colonization, story, primary/elementary teacher

### **1 The Context**

#### **1.1 The Colonial Landscape in Canada**

As White settler scholars and researchers committed to working alongside Aboriginal peoples as allies in challenging normative colonial discourses, we begin this paper by situating our work on Treaty 4 land in Southern Saskatchewan. We do this also to recognize the significance of histories of places whose residues and wisdoms continue to in/form contemporary understandings and engagements with the land (Chambers, 2006). This land that we live and work on, to which our privileges are directly linked, has stories to tell of colonialism, European contact, and settler invasion (Sterzuk, 2011). The history of Canada, too often represented primarily as one of patriotic and pioneering nation-building, is more accurately one of colonialism, whereby Europeans came to the land, established dominance over pre-existing Aboriginal communities, and then ensured that vast tracts of land could be “settled” in order to consolidate control from east to west, north to south. In light of this, colonialism “positions White settlers at the top of a racial hierarchy” so that we may “occupy a place of dominance, not necessarily through our individual choices but through the processes and institutions that serve us” (Sterzuk, 2011, p. 4).

The dominant nationalist narrative is that the signing of the numbered treaties in Western Canada between First Nations and the British Crown ensured that the land could be settled 'peacefully' rather than through a process of war and bloodshed that had occurred to the south of the border in the United States. This dominant narrative is simply not true, or at least, it hides some important truths about genocide, racism, and systematic plans of assimilation and destruction (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Dashchuk, 2013). For First Nations peoples whose way of life had been irrevocably changed by European imperialism, treaties represented a bridge to the future for their children. Affected by the decimation of the buffalo by Europeans, faced with ongoing disease and starvation, and the erosion of a way of life, First Nations leaders agreed to negotiate the terms and conditions of the numbered treaties. These negotiations were not simple, often lasted days or weeks, and required compromise between the signatories. In the end, treaties allowed for the sharing of land, and depending on the number of the treaty, specific provisions or clauses with respect to the amount of reserve lands per band, annual treaty annuities, education, healthcare, farming implements, hunting and fishing rights, etc (Miller, 2009). The treaties are foundational to the history of Canada, yet most Canadians know very little about them (Miller, 2009).

Ignorance of the foundational importance of treaties can be understood as a function of colonialism, and more specifically what Calderón (2011) refers to in her scholarship as "colonial blind discourses." These discourses fail to acknowledge ongoing processes and practices of colonialism that position Aboriginal peoples as 'other', as less than, as non-citizens of the nation, despite national narratives of justice and fairness (Burrows, 2013; Tupper, 2014; Montgomery, 2008). Dominant narratives of Canada are necessary to the colonial project as they depict a history of an empty land, open and available for settlement (Furniss, 1999). There is an inherent practice of colonial amnesia at the heart of the creation and perpetuation of these Canadian "grand nationalist narratives", which begin with the arrival of Europeans, focus primarily on European (male) progress, obscure historical context, and are premised on a series of racialized exclusions (Stanley, 2006). These narratives work to affirm White settler identities as hard working, industrious, courageous, and as embodying the pioneering spirit necessary to the early economic success of Canada. Rendered absent in these narratives of course is how the land came to be available for settlement in the first place (Raulston Saul, 2014).

In schools throughout Saskatchewan, colonial blind discourses deny the continuing harm embedded in settlers' historical and contemporary relationships with Aboriginal people (Calderón, 2009). As such, possibilities for reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples become very challenging. In light of the shared history of this country and the importance of the numbered treaties to this history, the Office of the Treaty Commissioner (OTC) created curriculum materials for Saskatchewan teachers

to invite students into a different consideration of the past and present. Because of the work of the OTC, in 2008, the provincial government made treaty education a mandatory curricular initiative in the province for K-12 classrooms. Treaty education "invites teachers to include in implemented curriculum historical and contemporary stories, knowledge, and experiences of First Nations people, including those deeply connected to colonialism" (Tupper, 2014, p. 471).

As a mandatory curriculum commitment, a central goal is "the foundational entrenchment of First Nations and Métis ways of knowing, content and perspectives" (Government of Saskatchewan, 2008) in all school subjects. To be clear, and as has been described elsewhere (Tupper & Cappello, 2008; Tupper, 2014), treaty education is much more than teaching the facts of the numbered treaties. It helps teachers and their students to consider the historical and colonial context of treaty making, the spirit and intent of the treaties, treaty promises made but not always kept, and contemporary treaty issues often connected to historical failures of the government to honour the treaties. As such, treaty education provides a lens through which students and their teachers may come to re-read, re-write, and re-narrate the past, attending to a history of Canada that has not been part of the dominant story of this nation. In this sense, treaty education is anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and anti-colonial (Kumashiro, 2004; Pratt, 2004, Stanley, 2000). The work of treaty education creates spaces and opportunities for young people to understand contemporary issues faced by Aboriginal peoples and to consider their own responsibilities in shaping a different future for all Canadians.

Within the treaty education materials provided to teachers in Saskatchewan is information about the Indian Act, particularly the aspects of the Act which violated the terms and conditions of treaties and led to the creation of Indian Residential Schools in Canada. Henderson (2014) makes the argument that ignoring the history of Aboriginal-Canadian relations, and more specifically the treaties and the Indian Act, "only galvanizes this idea that Canada is a European state and foreign to oppressive practices" (p. 2). Further, Dénommé-Welch and Montero (2014) state, "Indian Residential Schools and American Indian boarding schools were used to Christianize, civilize and assimilate the natives by immersing them in Eurocentric ways" (137). Far from fulfilling the stated aims of creating fit and healthy bodies capable of contributing to agricultural and domestic labour, the schools resulted in weakened bodies, grotesquely high rates of morbidity and mortality, and a long legacy of bodily, cultural, and psychological devastation (Kelm, 2003). Residential schools have been further described as vehicles for cultural genocide (Regan, 2010). As such, the significance of the historical and contemporary legacies of residential schools cannot be understated in the context of treaty education and in the work of classroom teachers to tell a different story.

## 2 The Research Project

Against the backdrop of colonialism and racism, our research (funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada) sought to explore with elementary teachers and their students what it means to be a treaty person in Canada. For the purposes of this paper, we focus on one classroom, one teacher, and one group of students in the second year of the project to illustrate the challenges and possibilities of treaty education to reshape understanding. We highlight the teacher's use of technology to invite her students into a treaty education inquiry and the corresponding digital stories created by the grade 3 students she was alongside. We argue that the stories the young people created through this research project are illustrative of the power of treaty education to reshape an understanding of Canada, one in which reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and settler Canadians becomes more possible.

Although this paper focuses specifically on a particular classroom from the second year of the project, it is perhaps helpful to contextualize the project by briefly describing its overall trajectory (as discussed in greater detail in Couros et al., 2013). Over the two-years of the project, we worked with four elementary classrooms in four different schools - two with predominantly non-Aboriginal student populations, and two with a large majority of Aboriginal students. Each year, there were several core visits to each classroom: an early visit with Nehiyaw (Cree) Knowledge Keeper and Interdisciplinary Artist/Storyteller Joseph Naytowhow of Sturgeon Lake First Nation, in which Joseph worked with students to establish a Circle and explain its significance; an introduction to stories and storytelling by a member of the research team; and an introduction to the iPads and to relevant iPad apps, led by another member. In all, the researchers visited each classroom approximately eight times.

During the first year of the project, the research team tried to avoid prescribing a direction for teachers and students to travel in, hoping instead to support and encourage an open-ended inquiry into treaties and treaty education. At times, this resulted in discomfort on the part of the teachers. This discomfort was, in part, a result of the teachers' struggles with the tensions of an apparent desire to engage in treaty education in the "correct" way and a fear of accidentally offending someone or disrespecting Aboriginal protocols. However, it also stemmed from the fundamental incompatibility with more traditional ways of teaching social studies and, indeed, with the ways in which Canadian teachers are discursively produced to perform particular narratives of the "good" teacher as value-free and a-political. Certainly, we are not commenting on the flawed character of any one of these teachers, but rather on the complex condition of knowledge production that produces them as subjects desiring to be good, equitable, and just in their pedagogy. Consequently, the team realized the need to include an additional visit dedicated to an overview of treaty education using resources provided by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner (e.g., maps

showing treaty lands and information pertaining to who signed and why as well as what it means to be a treaty person).

The team's work with the predominantly non-Aboriginal urban grade three class in the second year of the project began early in the school year, with the core visits described above. At this time, the inquiry focussed on the question: "What does it mean to be a treaty person." In addition, the research team worked with the teacher to create resources and lessons targeted to help students to explore the key inquiry question. For instance, team members created an age-appropriate text describing the signing of Treaty Four at Fort Qu'Appelle in Southern Saskatchewan, which the students then took up by creating Puppet Pals videos and podcasts in which they imagined themselves travelling back to the time of the Treaty signing. At the teacher's request, the research team also led the students in creating and presenting tobacco pouches to Joseph Naytowhow. Throughout the year, members of the research team paid regular visits to the classroom to support activities, to provide assistance with the technological aspects of the project, and to allow students to share their progress. It is important to note, however, that the researchers were guided by a determination to respond to the requests and needs of the teacher and her students, as opposed to imposing resources and visits. As with any curriculum, one size does not fit all; treaty education must be tailored to the abilities, needs, and interests of the learners in the classroom.

Several key elements stand out in the research team's experience with the grade three classroom. The first was the students' engagement with Joseph. Through his work with them around traditional Cree teachings, stories, and songs, it was evident that students were able to better comprehend the cultural significance of the treaties as well as the importance of storied ways of knowing, both of which translated into richer digital stories. A key moment occurred during one of Joseph's visits, when a self-identified Aboriginal student asked whether he went to Powwows. Joseph responded that he did and began drumming and singing, and the young girl smiled broadly and hugged herself, clearly responding to the affirmation of her cultural heritage. Additionally, when the students presented one of their early digital stories to Joseph, he noted that the treaties were about sharing the land, not about giving it up; this important teaching re-emerged in later projects as students created digital stories that explicitly highlighted the importance of sharing the land.

Another important element of the research that unfolded in the grade three classroom was the way in which the teacher allowed her students to direct the inquiry. After introducing the students to some general topics around treaties and the treaty relationship, the teacher encouraged students to explore their own interests, culminating in a final digital story with a student-selected topic and format. For instance, some students developed an interest in residential schools and decided to create a final video that showcased their research on the topic, while another group wanted to



learn more about the Oka crisis and eventually created a stop-motion video depicting their understanding of the event. Although the teacher expressed some concerns about the disordered chronology of students' learning about the treaties, the final products demonstrated that the grade three students developed a rich understanding of the subjects they chose to explore, creating a solid foundation for future treaty education.

### 3 Methodology and Methods of Inquiry

As we note in Couros et al. (2013), our research drew upon qualitative methodology, using elements of participatory action research to structure the inquiry. In participatory action research, or PAR, participants are involved in the research through an inquiry into both the current situation (in this case, the teaching of treaty education) and an exploration of how that situation might be improved. It utilized critical reflection on the part of the participants in order to "work toward new realizations about self and other" (Couros et al., 2013, p. 547).

Within the framework of PAR, the research team employed digital storytelling methods, that is "the use of digital tools and media to develop, create, enhance, and share stories" (Couros et al., 2013, p. 546) to support students' inquiry. While there are great numbers of devices and apps that support digital storytelling in the classroom, our team purchased a set of iPads for student use. We found that tablet devices such as the iPads were ideal for students of this age as they were mobile, easily held, intuitive, and familiar to many of the students. These iPads were equipped with cameras that allowed for digital photos and video. Apple's App Store hosts hundreds of possible apps that are suitable for digital storytelling.

While the team created a list of apps that are commonly used to create digital stories, our teacher in this classroom, Claire, introduced the research team to an app called Puppet Pals. This digital tool allows users with little technological knowledge to create fairly sophisticated animated stories. When using the app for digital storytelling, students chose one or more characters to animate on a variety of backdrops. Students could then speak through the characters by recording their voices while moving the character on the chosen backdrop. Voice, movement, interaction, and scaling of characters was recorded so that these stories could be later viewed or published to the Web.

The paid version of Puppet Pals allows users to create their own backdrops and characters. This meant that Claire could have her students create custom characters and backdrops that were relevant to Treaty Education. In one activity, students drew backdrops of Fort Qu'Appelle Saskatchewan (where Treaty Four was signed) along with First Nations and settler individuals who would have been present at the time of signing. Students used the app to record the imagined dialogue and interactions between First Nations and settlers in order to better understand the historical and foundational significance of the signing of the numbered treaties.

An Apple TV device was also adopted in this classroom. Through Apple's proprietary software 'Air Play,' students could wirelessly share their work from any iPad in the classroom to a projector connected to Apple TV. This practice replaced that of having to physically connect the iPad at the front of the room through a VGA cable and dongle. Beyond the sometimes technically frustrating aspects of the former method, the wireless method created a more seamless environment for sharing and gave more control of the learning environment to students.

While there are a host of apps that can be used for digital storytelling on the iPad, we found that the ones deemed most relevant to the students in the context of this project allowed for the capturing of audio, personal photographs, or video. In particular, students were able to employ aural and visual modalities as they gained a historical understanding of Treaties and recognized their relationship to Treaties in a modern context. These modalities, along with the intuitiveness of the tablets, provided a rich environment for sense-making and knowledge construction through the development of multimedia-enriched narratives.

### 4 Narrative Reflections

#### 4.1 What does it mean to be a treaty person?

##### Reflections from a teacher researcher, researcher and knowledge keeper

In what follows, three members of the research collaborative share their reflections on the research, students' learning, their own self-awareness and the significance of treaty education. These reflections are illustrative of the significant learning that was experienced by members of the research team both in terms of teaching treaties and the treaty relationship and using digital resources to support a meaningful and sustained engagement with Aboriginal - Canadian relations.

##### *Claire's Research Narrative: "Something to Hold on To."*

It is not uncommon for an individual to be exceptionally well-versed on the theories of cross-cultural effectiveness, possess the best of motives, and be sincerely concerned about enacting his [sic] role accordingly, yet be unable to demonstrate those understandings in his own behavior. (Ruben & Kealey, 1979)

I grew up in the multicultural suburbs of Vancouver, have lived amongst the Inuit in the Canadian Arctic and have travelled extensively. Given these experiences, I have always considered myself to be open-minded, culturally sensitive and liberal in my ideas and outlook. So it was with great surprise and chagrin that I found myself making many colonial-minded missteps and mistakes as I began this Digital Storytelling project.

Many of the mistakes that I made that first year and continue to make (although less frequently) I see now as a result of my own Euro-centricity. Over and over again, I leapt without looking, assuming that I would naturally, and without any change required within myself, land on



the right foot and march off in the right direction. That somehow, by virtue of my own innate abilities I would be able to bring a quality treaty education program to my classroom. I assumed that without doing any additional research or even looking at the treaty education outcomes, I would be able to teach this program effectively.

Complicating matters further, I misunderstood the nature of treaty education at its most basic level. I assumed that this program was all about First Nations peoples and cultures and had very little to do with myself or my predominantly non-aboriginal students. I presented my program that first year as a magnanimous offering of indigenous content. At that time, I did not realize that I too was a "treaty person" and that treaty education was also about me.

Most cringe-worthy perhaps was the disconnect that developed between what I understood about the First Nations of Canada and the failure to demonstrate that understanding to my students. I know that there are many hundreds of First Nations in Canada with vastly different cultures and histories. I know that the term "First Nations" is problematic in that it represents these hundreds of distinct First Nations as one entity. And yet, in practice I found myself frequently failing to make this distinction to my students. I fell into the "us" and "them" paradigm, using First Nations resources interchangeably, swapping Coast Salish for Cree for Saulteaux for Wendat all under the "First Nations" moniker.

After the first year of this project, and with many of these mistakes made and learned from, I realized that I was not, nor could I easily become, an expert on treaties. That was the simple truth. The challenge then became how to offer a treaty education program, knowing next to nothing about treaties and the treaty relationship. The path forward, however, was quite simple; I needed to become a learner alongside my students. So I began the year admitting to my class my lack of expertise in this area, and presenting them with a question: "What does it mean to be a treaty person?"

One of the many gifts of the treaty education program is that it provides a space and a structure for the discussion of ideas. Furthermore, these ideas tend to centre on questions of identity and belonging, something to which students naturally gravitate. With our current data-centred focus in education, sometimes we forget about ideas. And yet, I have found, that what students appreciate most is this sharing and developing of ideas or, as one student has put it, these "life lessons".

I asked some of my students who participated what they thought of our treaty education program. Anna (9 years old) went away and took two pages to answer me. In short, this is what she said:

"I don't know why any teacher would not teach their students treaty education in Canada where treaties are a big problem because the government didn't keep their promises. I was inspired by the treaties. I like to think about what could have happened differently. I find that it is not as useless as fractions. It's more of a life lesson, something to hold on to."

Ellie, also 9 years old, wrote the following:

"Since many people don't know about treaties, it's important for people to respect treaties. Everyone must know that treaties were signed. The treaty was a promise. And it's important for everyone to learn about how aboriginal people were on the land first. Teachers must teach us so we know our history so when we are older we will know more and things will be better."

One of the pedagogical lessons that I learned as a part of this project was to step back. So often classrooms are really all about the teacher, and mine had been no different. Now suddenly, I wasn't the expert, it wasn't about what I wanted to teach but what my students wanted to learn. And my students did want to learn about the treaties. Many teachers avoid teaching Treaty Education for a whole host of reasons, one of them being that they're afraid that their students will find it boring. In my experience, students are eager to learn about treaties because it affects them right now. They are on this land. They are bound by this treaty. They want to know why and how and what comes next. As Anna said, it's not as esoteric as fractions, treaties are tangible, and references to them are constantly in the news. Last year we spent a lot of time talking about Idle No More. This year we talked about Neil Young's Anti-Tar Sands tour. It wasn't until the end of last year that it dawned on me that this was what inquiry looks like.

I also discovered that most of my assumptions about what an 8 year-old could reasonably comprehend and achieve were wrong. I had been setting the bar way too low. Many times I hesitated to start a given task because I wasn't sure how to do it or how the students were going to accomplish it. One such assignment was to make iMovies. I knew nothing about iMovie. I felt like I needed to learn it first so at the very least, I could answer any questions students may have. A member of the team came in one day to do an introductory session on the program. His introduction comprised handing out the iPads and telling the students to get started. He wandered around and showed them a few tricks but by and large my students figured it out for themselves, no major lesson required! Again, it was learning to step back and let my students take charge of their own learning, and learning to trust that they could do it. Over and over again, my students showed me that not only could they accomplish what we set out to do, for the most part on their own, but they could do it better and more competently than I had thought possible.

Besides technical skills, my other concern had been whether 8 year-olds could handle the open-ended nature of our topic. There is no conclusive answer to "What does it mean to be a treaty person?" Could an 8 year-old reasonably be expected to comprehend the complexity and uncertainty of that line of thought? What if they ended up more confused than when we began? In the end, it turned out that they valued the complexity. In their final projects last year, almost every group mentioned that after a year of study they still didn't



know what it means to be a treaty person. But they went on to talk about how they now saw it as meaning several different things and holding a number of different, often conflicting, emotions for them. It was stunning to hear 8 year-olds discuss the intricacy of their emotions and reactions to being a treaty person with such depth and with such creativity.

On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made an historic apology on behalf of the Government of Canada for the legacy of residential schools. He called on all Canadians to join First Nations on a journey towards “healing, reconciliation and resolution” and to forge a new relationship based on respect and renewed understanding. I think that teachers are uniquely placed to contribute to the building of this relationship. And that the best place to start is with giving our students a solid understanding of what it means to be a treaty person.

But it is more than that. Through treaty education and its themes of identity and belonging students and teachers alike begin to see themselves within a greater context. Looking at the treaties from multiple perspectives gives students the opportunity to “engage in honest, reflective dialogue about our shared but conflicting stories—our histories” as Paulette Regan (2010) has written in her book, *Unsettling the Settler Within*. It is only through these discussions that we can begin to see our own narrow viewpoints and how they connect, intersect and conflict with those around us. These are the first few steps towards intercultural competency, an essential skill set for successful collaboration and communication across cultures. Not only does treaty education prepare students to be Canadians, it also prepares them to become effective, more thoughtful citizens of the world.

#### **Joseph’s Narrative: Tipahamatowin / Ostisimaw- asinahikan (treaty payments /treaty, constitution**

These past three years being involved as part of the University of Regina educational research team have been insightful and filled with joy. I wouldn’t have it any other way. The research involved inquiring into treaties and the classroom. In specific, two schools had volunteered to be a part of the research, a First Nation and Euro/Canadian elementary school.

My experience as traditional knowledge keeper and a resource with knowledge of treaties comes with mixed emotions. For the past thirty years, I’ve been advocating through storytelling and cultural information the need for Canadians in general to understand the world I came from. This world is nehiyo-itapsinowin (world as seen through cree/four-bodied-people’s eyes). I feel relieved that all the years of educating Canadian children, students and adults may have had some impact in a small way within the province of Saskatchewan’s educational goals. I don’t really know.

Now with Saskatchewan Learning making it a requirement to teach about treaties in the classroom since 2007, the future generations will finally begin to live by the words the elders have spoken: words that were fundamentally saying that we need to get along and

share this land equally.

It’s a beginning.

The students from both schools, I discovered, had little or no knowledge about treaties but had the enthusiasm to begin learning about them. Teachers also had little to a fair amount of knowledge about treaties that were part of the research.

I’m happy with the outcomes of the research. It appeared at times that students and teachers were both learning about treaties at the same time.

Before all the school visits began we did the proper protocol of offering an elder tobacco and broadcloth to ask for consent to undertake the inquiry as well as too request for guidance. As a traditional knowledge keeper I understand that building a good relationship with local Treaty Four elders is paramount to this research. It was the way treaty elders had done it at the time of signing of the treaties. The treaty was a sacred covenant. There needs to be a sacred stem and pipe bowl ceremony to acknowledge the higher spiritual forces. For myself coming from the Treaty Six area I felt supported and welcomed once the ceremony was conducted.

As a traditional knowledge keeper I was both teacher and observer. I understood treaties from an oral tradition perspective. The treaty story was meant to be passed down from one generation to the next in the language of the treaty signatories, in my case nehiyowewin pikiskwewin (loosely translated as Cree language). So, I used as much of the language while talking with students to illustrate the way children might have learned about their history and their treaty. So much is missed when treaties are taught without the use of a first nation language. I felt somewhat at a disadvantage that I not know the treaty six story through the voice of the elders who still know the original story.

The children we visited in the four schools had the enthusiasm as I said previously and perhaps that is enough to create interest and a hunger for more knowledge about Treaty Four in specific. This was the treaty area for both these two communities that were involved.

It will be a long journey for treaties to be truly recognized as having meaning in their lives. We may have only opened the door to one another’s way of being and learning. I’m optimistic, yet concerned for teachers who’re not equipped with the information and traditional background to effectively teach about treaties.

#### **Patrick J Lewis’ Narrative: Researching Teaching Treaty Education 2.0**

We began our research project with the rather long title, “Storying Treaties and the Treaty Relationship: Enhancing Treaty Education through Digital Storytelling” in the late autumn of 2011. At the time I was looking forward to, you could say was excited about the prospect of working with two different groups of elementary students and their teachers, who would be able to engage in inquiry based learning utilizing storytelling as both the method of investigation and presentation of findings. Moreover, I was also anticipating working with my friend and storytelling colleague Joseph Naytowhow. Joseph worked



with the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and guided us through protocols and practice prior to and into the research project. He and I also worked closely with re/introducing and engaging the students and teachers with the importance and power of story to both inquire and to make sense of experience. Throughout this initial excitement what I didn't realize at the outset of the project nor well near the end of our first year of the two-year project is that I came to the research, and in particular the first two classroom school sites, with a large bag full of assumptions.

*What were some of my assumptions?* First, and this should have been painfully obvious, just because I perceived inquiry based learning and storytelling as somehow liberatory to mainstream notions of teaching and learning, I mistakenly assumed the collaborating teachers and their students would take up this opportunity and run with it. Second, I assumed the collaborating teachers would draw upon the Treaty Education Kits as their core resources to begin an exploration of Treaties after initial visits; rather the teachers continually deferred to the research team to initiate, lead, teach and discuss treaty education. In retrospect, we were not sufficiently clear in communicating with and providing support and guidance to the two teachers about each person's role, responsibilities, and expectations during the project. Finally, and most important as I began to perceive some of the aforementioned things emerge into the first year, I was quick to assume that it was a resistance on the part of the teachers; a resistance to taking up the mandated teaching of treaties, which was only a few years old at the time. Although, there is some resistance I came to see that it was more an uncertainty and struggle on the part of many teachers with how to best take up the teaching of treaties. Furthermore, it was a conceit, if not arrogance on my part to rationalize the less than stellar results from the first year of the research project as a failure on the part of the teachers to engage in the project in the way I imagined they should.

*What else did I learn about myself through this experience?* Talking with Joseph before one of our school visits I wanted to discuss what we might plan to do with the 11 and 12 year old children we were to work alongside for the next 6 months in our research project. I shared my carefully planned idea of how we might begin and some of the ideas we should think about introducing, he nodded thoughtfully commenting that it all sounded very interesting and would be good to share with the children and the teacher. When I asked what he thought we should do he simply paused, thought for a moment and said,

"We should smudge before we start."

I replied, "we won't be able to do it in the school because we didn't ask ahead of time. The fire regulations will prevent us from just doing it on our own."  
"Oh yes", said Joseph, unperturbed, "well let's just smudge in the parking lot, before we go in."

I like to plan ahead when I am in a teaching context and even though this was a research project it was all about teaching and inquiry. So, I pursued my line of asking Joseph what he thought we should do. He thought for a moment then said,

"What stories are you going to share?"

Oh good I thought, now we are getting somewhere and we can finish sketching out our plan. So I said, "Well I thought we would start in the circle and I would re-introduce the project and review the significance of the circle, then tell the Celtic creation story, *Oran Mor*".

Joseph smiled and said, "Yes, that's a good story. What else are you going to tell?"

"Oh", I cheerfully replied, "I thought I would tell a story called Victor the Baker and Cynthia the Cellist"

Joseph nodded his head and asked, "What's that about?"

I told him a condensed version of the story and he smiled and said,

"That's a good story, I like that one". I waited to hear what he was going to do, but he proceeded to get his smudge bowl and materials out of his pack as we continued driving down the road toward the school.

Through this experience and many more similar ones I came to recognize that although I thought I understood myself with respect to how I have been constructed as a teacher and a storyteller, I did not really. Realizing how much I am still subject to my teacher apprenticeship of observation in my need to plan and be prepared even when I think I have broken those bonds or at least transcended them in some way was brought home to me in my experience working closely with Joseph and the research project.

Being alongside Joseph in this way he taught me to let go or rather open up to what some aboriginal scholars and elders call the "learning spirit", something of which I thought I knew a little and wrote about in the storytelling context. However, I realize I did not readily take in and/or extend into the practice of my everyday life. That day and all of the other visits to the schools when Joseph and I were sharing stories in the circle with the students I came just a little bit closer to understanding the learning spirit through Joseph's quiet thoughtful guidance. The spirit of the stories guided us in our telling; Joseph helped me better understand the Nēhiyaw (Cree) term *miskasowin*, go to your origins, go to the centre of your self to find your own belonging which may include dream, prayer, and ceremony.

*What struck me the most about the experience of the research project?* What emerged throughout the project with all four school groups with whom we worked was the question of the Residential School System of Canada and its ongoing legacy. I came to see that the teaching of Treaties couldn't be done without enlightening both students and teachers (all Canadians) about the history of the residential schools in Canada. During the project students and teachers would raise questions about First Nation education and how to reconcile it as in the treaties with how it was manifested through residential



schools. Many of our undergraduate students coming into our teacher education program know little or nothing about the history of residential schools and their legacy nor do they know much about treaties. But what really brought this home to me was something that was in part influenced by this project. A small group of faculty in our Faculty of Education hosted the *Legacy of Hope Foundations 100 Years of Loss* exhibition in an effort to try and take up that need to enlighten Canadians about the Residential School System of Canada. It was at the University of Regina in the autumn of 2013 for 3 weeks

open to the public. Students from the Faculty of Education and beyond as well as upper elementary students from local school district visited the exhibition. During one of the elementary school group visits our managing editor of our journal, *in education* and the faculty's Education News was on site taking photographs. I share one of the photos below and resist re/framing it for the viewer. However, I must ask myself some questions: What is this photo? Is it a photo of hope? Is it a photo of despair? Is it a photo of resistance and resurgence? What is this photo to you?



*100 Years of Loss, The Residential School System in Canada: Boys looking at the Boys*  
The photo exemplifies for me the importance of the enormity of work that needs to be done to continue to grow the teaching of treaties in the K-12 school system, the history and legacy of residential schools, and the need to support Indigenous resurgence through teacher education and decolonisation. Photo Credit: Shuana Niessen (2013)

## 5 Conclusion

Claire's narrative demonstrates the potential for treaty education to provide an opening for a new discussion around treaties and the treaty relationship, both in the Saskatchewan context and on a national and global scale. Through a process of inquiry learning, the students in the class were frequently able to ask difficult, sometimes discomfiting questions about the treaties, questions that might begin the process of disrupting dominant discourses of colonialism. Throughout the course of the year, the research team witnessed a shift in the students' consciousness as they started to think differently about the historical and contemporary nature of the treaties and to trouble their own commonsense understanding of Canadian history; this shift in thinking is a critical first step in disrupting colonial-blind discourses in ways that unsettle the practice of "othering" that has been deeply inscribed into Aboriginal-settler relations in this country. The stories that the young people told and created are good starting places; they clearly illustrate the potential

for treaty education to speak back to existing narratives of Canada and to pave a path toward reconciliation.

However, we continue to be cognizant of the conditions of knowledge production that produce well-intentioned teachers who know very little if anything about treaty education. While this lack of knowledge may be framed as an individual deficit on the part of the teacher(s) it must be understood as representative of the power of dominant narratives to in/form teaching and learning. Like critical pedagogy, treaty education can ideally be "about changing the conditions of knowledge production so that none can find easy sanctuary in ignorance" (Montgomery, 2013, p.13). Yet, toward such an ideal teachers must move far beyond building taco tipis and other multicultural celebratory activities that they can easily and confidently implement in their classrooms which, "despite good intentions, colonize more than they liberate" (Gorski, 2009, p. 522). Teachers must be willing to take treaty education material up in complex non-linear ways that are less reflective of westernized



approaches to knowledge and the perceived need for 'expertise'. Teachers and teacher educators should consciously move beyond a notion of cultural sensitivity toward culturally responsive pedagogy. As our research has revealed, treaty education does not always (nor should it) lend itself to a pre-determined scope and sequence.

Movement toward a humbly practiced authentic engagement in treaty education, involving the deliberate, and often difficult, supplanting of hubris and egoism with a crucial commitment to understanding one's own complicity within historical and present-day imbalanced relations of power, might make it less possible for both teachers and students to claim ignorance and thus to participate in the reproduction of those colonial blind discourses necessary for colonial ontologies to persist. Crucial in this regard is the connecting of theory to practice in relation to the spirit and intent of treaties and particularly from First Nations' perspectives both historically and currently. The legacy of the colonial narrative of the making of Canada created an education system that has denied Canadians a more accurate account of the history of relations between First Nations and settler Canadians. It is a long standing position of First Nations, documented over the past 150 years, that treaties are generally seen as a covenant between First Peoples and settlers to share the land, a sharing that has been systematically dishonoured by successive Canadian governments and the people of Canada.

## References

Anderson, M.C. & Robertson, C. L. (2011). *Seeing red: A history of natives in Canadian newspapers*. Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press.

Burrows, T. A. (2013). *Problematizing racialism: Exploring the complexities of*

*racialization and the structuring forces of Whiteness in the lived experiences of high school social studies*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Regina: University of Regina.

Calderón, D. (2011). Locating the foundations of epistemologies of ignorance in education ideology and practice. In E. Malewski & N. Jaramillo (Eds.), *Epistemologies of Ignorance in Education* (pp.105-127). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Chambers, C. (2006). "The land is the best teacher I have ever had": Places as pedagogy for precarious times. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 22(3), 27-37.

Couros, A., Montgomery, K., Tupper, J., Hildebrandt, K., Naytowhow, J., & Lewis, P. J. (2013). Storying Treaties and the Treaty Relationship. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 6(4), 544-558.

Daschuk, J. (2013). *Clearing the plains: Disease, politics of starvation and loss of Aboriginal life*. Regina: University of Regina Pres.

Dénonné-Welch, S., & Montero, M. K. (2014). De/colonizing preservice teacher education: Theatre of the academic absurd. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* [Online],10 (1), 136-165. Retrieved from <http://jolle.coe.uga.edu>.

Furniss, E. (1999), *The Burden of history: Colonialism and the frontier myth in a rural Canadian community*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Gorski, P. (2009). [Good intentions are not enough: A de-colonizing intercultural education](#). *Intercultural Education*, 19(6), 515-526.

Henderson, M. (2014). *The Indian Act: Teaching apartheid in Canada*. Winnipeg Free Press, April 22, 2014.

Kelm, Mary-Ellen. (2003). "'A Scandalous Procession': Residential Schooling and the Re/formation of Aboriginal Bodies, 1900-1950." In *Children, teachers and schools in the history of British Columbia*, edited by Jean Barman and Mona Gleason, 39-54. Calgary: Detselig.

Kumashiro, K.K. (2004). *Against common sense: teaching and learning toward social justice*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Montgomery, K. (2013). "Pedagogy and privilege: Reflections on the challenges and possibilities of teaching critically about racism." *Critical Education*, 4(1), 1-22.

Montgomery, K. (2008). "A better place to live": School history textbooks, nationalist fantasies, and the incarcerating banality of White supremacy. In J. Satterthwaite, M. Watts, and H. Piper (Eds.). *Talking truth, confronting power: Discourse power, resistance, volume 6*. Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Press (pp. 83-98).

Niessen, S. (2013). Two young students learning about residential school students at the 100 years of Loss exhibit. *Education news*. Retrieved from: <http://www2.uregina.ca/education/news/?cat=40>

Pratt, M.L. (2004). The Anticolonial Past. *Modern Language Quarterly*, 65(3), 443-456.

Regan, P. (2010). *Unsettling the settler within: Indian residential schools, truth telling, and reconciliation in Canada*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Stanley, T.J. (2000). "Why I Killed Canadian History: Towards an Anti-Racist History in Canada." *Histoire sociale / Social History* 33(65) 79-103.

Stanley, T. J. (2006). Whose public? Whose memory? Racisms, grand narratives, and Canadian history. In Ruth W. Sandwell, (Ed.) *To The Past: History Education, Public Memory and Citizenship Education in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press (pp. 32-49).

Sterzuk, A. (2011). *The struggle for legitimacy: Indigenized Englishes in settler schools*. Toronto, ON: Multilingual Matters.

Tupper, J. (2014). The possibilities of reconciliation through difficult dialogues: Treaty education as peacebuilding. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 44(4), 469-488.

Tupper, J. & Cappello, M. (2008). Teaching treaties as (un)usual narratives: Disrupting the curricular commonsense. *Curriculum Inquiry* 38(5), pp. 559-578.

