Foregrounding Anishinaabek Culture and Collaborating With Children In Their Multimodal Text Creation

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Abstract

In this paper, we examine 4- and 5-year-old Anishinaabek children's text creation and identity (re)formations while involved in collaborative writing with their Anishinaabek teacher about the moose hunting practices of their northern community. The teacher took on a role as an emergent writer alongside the children, voicing her memories of moose hunting with family members and her thinking as she drew pictures and used the marks, letter-like forms, and letters that her students used to create the collaborative text. Inductive analysis of talk and nonverbal communication in the video recordings of the teacher's interactions with the children, as well as analysis of the collaboratively created text and the children's independent texts, shows that the teacher created spaces for children to learn Anishinaabek cultural knowledge alongside literacy skills and knowledge.

Keywords: Indigenous, language, culture, literacies

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Introduction

Research conducted in early childhood settings in Indigenous communities in Canada shows that learning experiences based on Indigenous ways of knowing and being foster a strong sense of identity as well as lead to positive learning outcomes for Indigenous children (Hare & Anderson, 2010). Drawing on this research, we join other researchers (e.g., Battiste, 2013; Toulouse, 2011) in identifying a need for pedagogies, such as the writing instructional practices described in this paper, that reflect the local histories, traditions, and stories of the children's First Nation communities. These classroom-based practices complement broader initiatives to "reclaim and revitalize what has been disrupted and displaced by colonization" (McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 103).

In accordance with Anishinaabek cultural practices, we position ourselves in relation to school-based participants and their Anishinaabek community and describe the project that provides the wider context for our paper. This practice aligns with recognized Indigenous research practices as explained by Kovach (2021). In the process of self-positioning, researchers provide a window into their worldviews and perspectives, which have led to the motivation and purpose of the research.

Shelley is the project director of the 14-year SSHRC-Partnership Grant-funded collaborative action research project, Northern Oral Language and Writing through Play (NOW Play), with two phases, the first beginning in April 2013 and the second in April 2020. The project involves northern Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers in collaborative action research with Shelley, Jeffrey, and other university researchers. A senior administrator of the Anishinaabek school board contacted Shelley, explaining that the school board's goals aligned with the project's focus on supporting young children's language, literacy, and cultural learning. After Shelley met with the Chief and Council, the Board of Education, and the school principal and completed the Board's ethics process, the Board of Education decided to become a partner in the NOW Play project. Mrs. Jenny (all names are pseudonyms) and five of her colleagues were participants in this project at the time the data for this paper were gathered. Mrs. Jenny has since retired, though her colleagues continue to participate.

With roots in the Netherlands, Ireland, and Scotland, Shelley grew up in a farm family in Alberta and taught primary grades in rural Alberta. She and Jeffrey, a primary teacher who has Métis and settler roots, having learned Anishinaabek teachings from his maternal grandmother, travel to the Anishinaabek community four or five times each school year to meet with participating teachers and support their action research. These visits include participation in land-based cultural experiences with teachers and their students. Naz and Sudhashree were graduate research assistants at the time of the data collection in Mrs. Jenny's classroom. Naz emigrated as an infant with her family from Tabriz, Iran, during the Iran-Iraq war as an Azeri-Iranian

refugee. Sudhashree, who spent her childhood in rural India, is from an upper-caste Hindu family. Both Naz and Sudhashree bring to their analysis practices their experience as English language learners and as teachers of young children. Naz and Sudhashree transcribed video data recorded by Mrs. Jenny, the Anishinaabek kindergarten teacher, and her 4- and 5-year-old students, and assisted Jeffrey and Shelley with data analysis.

Research Questions

In this paper, we examine young Anishinaabek children's text creation as well as their interactions with each other and their Anishinaabek teacher while engaged in collaborative and independent writing. We highlight how Mrs. Jenny's collaborative writing with her students as she took up the role of an emergent writer and talked with students about moose hunting experiences created space for the foregrounding of Anishinaabek land- and oral tradition-based cultural knowledge alongside mainstream language arts curriculum expectations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

Our research centered on these questions:

1. How did Mrs. Jenny support students in creating texts that drew on the Anishinaabek cultural practices of their community?
2. What roles did talk, print, and other semiotic tools play in students' creation of texts and communication of ideas through reading their texts to others?

We situate our research within sociocultural theory and Anishinaabek worldviews, drawing on early writing and drawing research. Relevant aspects of these theories and this body of research are discussed in the following section.

Theoretical Underpinnings and Related Research

Anishinaabek Worldviews

Anishinaabek culture and Anishinaabemowin, the language of the participating teacher, Mrs. Jenny, and her students' community, are intertwined. Anishinaabek pedagogy is focused on the child in relation to the land, water, ice, and sky, along with wider human and nonhuman kin (Oskineegish, 2014). Being in relation not only refers to immediate family and relatives but also to the web of kinship, including birds, fish, plants, and "all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined" (King, 1990, p. ix). Making connections to the land involves taking up a holistic perspective, recognizing that teachers and children are a part of nature, and placing an emphasis on the sacred relationships of all beings to each other and to the land.

Underpinning Anishinaabek pedagogy is the recognition that language and literacy teaching should be grounded in children's Anishinaabek culture and support their Anishinaabek identity

construction. Children's strong sense of identity and pride in who they are set important foundations for supporting children's learning (Toulouse, 2011).

Sociocultural Theory and Early Writing Research

This research takes up tenets of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), recognizing the relationship between talk and the thinking involved in writing. Research has shown that when young children talk with others and talk to themselves while writing, the talk is valuable in supporting their writing (Friedrich et al., 2019; Jesson et al., 2016). In Mrs. Jenny's class, the teacher voiced her thinking while writing and talked with children about their writing, modeling practices that would support children's creation of texts.

To our knowledge, extant research conducted in Indigenous early childhood settings has focused on young children's Indigenous language learning and not their writing (e.g., Hare & Anderson, 2010; McCarty et al., 2021), so our literature review draws from research in non-Indigenous early childhood contexts. Early literacy research, conducted across many decades in non-Indigenous settings, has established that young children are active meaning-makers who construct hypotheses about print and about what they can do with texts (e.g., Kress, 1997; Mackenzie, 2014; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Long before young children write conventionally, they create and try out hypotheses about representing meaning symbolically through making scribbles, marks, drawings, letter-like forms, and letters (Clay, 1998; Tolchinsky, 2015).

The teacher's role in supporting children's writing involves demonstrating and explaining, asking questions, and/or using published texts as models for writing (e.g., Coker et al., 2016; Hall et al., 2015). Researchers have also documented informal teaching approaches, such as the teacher taking on a role as an emergent writer who writes alongside the children (Peterson & Senior, 2019). This role allows teachers to model the decision-making and hypothesis-constructing processes that children might take up in their writing. Mrs. Jenny recognized children's scribbles, drawings, and letter-like forms, as well as their use of letters and words, as written texts, as they created these texts to communicate information and experiences related to moose harvesting. Her teaching practices were consistent with the informal practices carried out by another kindergarten teacher in the NOW Play project and documented in a co-authored article with Shelley (Peterson & Senior, 2019).

Research Methods

Research Context, Participants, and Data Collection

The participating Anishinaabek community, with a population of approximately 3,500 people, is accessible by road, located less than 200 kilometers from the closest major urban centre. The community's kindergarten program follows an immersion model, where Anishinaabemowin, the

language of the community, and Anishinaabek culture are central to learning. Some children, who live with family members who speak the language, also use their ancestral language at home.

Mrs. Jenny's action research involved taking on a role as an emergent writer alongside a group of six kindergarten students whose parents/guardians had provided written consent for their children's participation in the research (which included being video-recorded and having their created texts photographed) and who verbally assented to being video-recorded. Seated around a round table, Mrs. Jenny and a small group of kindergarten children told stories of moose hunting as they created a collaborative text using scribbles, drawings, and other modes. Mrs. Jenny talked about her experiences and voiced her thoughts as she modeled mark-making/scribbles while sounding out words to communicate her social intentions. After participating in the collaborative writing, children created their texts.

Mrs. Jenny video-recorded their interactions while creating this collaborative text and later recorded the children reading their text creations aloud to her and their peers. The seven videos ranged from 16 seconds to 8 minutes 40 seconds in length.

Analysis

We began our multimodal analysis process of interactions (Norris, 2004) by watching the video recording of Mrs. Jenny and the children around the round table creating their collaborative text, noting talk, gestures, facial expressions, and actions. Naz and Sudhashree each transcribed the videos, included screenshots of participants periodically, and wrote a descriptive narrative account of the collaborative text creation and children's reading of texts they created independently.

We determined that our unit of analysis would be an action with accompanying talk, gestures, facial expressions, and/or sounds. We inductively analyzed each unit and then identified continuities across the seven videos to create a picture of how Anishinaabek and literate identities were scaffolded by Mrs. Jenny and taken up by participating children through talk, nonverbal communication, and drawing/scribbling/writing during the collaborative text creation and the individual read-alouds. We then reviewed the literature to identify links to themes that were generated. We discussed our interpretations and reflections during several collaborative authorship meetings.

In keeping with Norris's (2004) tenets of the goals of multimodal interaction analysis, we realize that our interpretations may not reflect the actual meaning beyond participating children's actions. Instead, they are our inferences, based on the culturally rooted knowledge that we each brought to the process; in other words, our funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), as an Indigenous researcher and three non-Indigenous researchers who have experience teaching in early learning settings.

In the following sections, we discuss Mrs. Jenny and her students' use of the community's cultural practices and knowledge about print and text creation in terms of themes describing Mrs. Jenny's teaching: (a) creating spaces for Anishinaabek cultural knowledge and practices alongside curriculum expectations; and (b) highlighting the multimodal meaning-making of text creation. Additionally, we found, in response to the second research question, that children's text creation and communication with others while reading their texts involved the use of talk, print, gestures, sound effects, and clues within the drawings, such as the relative size of objects.

Teaching Practices Supporting Children's Cultural Learning and Text Creation

Mrs. Jenny's classroom practice provided opportunities for children to create culturally relevant stories that foregrounded their Anishinaabek community's cultural practices and, at the same time, supported their learning about print and the creation of multimodal texts. Although teachers in early childhood classrooms often regard gun use as a taboo topic for children's writing in mainstream curricular practices (Peterson et al., 2018), Mrs. Jenny encouraged students to draw on their knowledge about hunting practices within their community. Secondly, Mrs. Jenny attributed as much importance to the process of text creation as to the product, creating space for children to use a wide range of communicative modes (e.g., verbal, print, visual, audible, and action modes) to make meaning. We discuss each of these two key themes in the following sections.

Creating Spaces for Anishinaabek Cultural Knowledge and Practices Alongside Literacy Skills and Knowledge

During the collaboratively written story experience where children dictated and Mrs. Jenny scribed, the children were afforded opportunities to recount and recreate the sequential steps involved in hunting moose for food. For instance, the children first suggested the inclusion of the sentence "Let's go hunting" to introduce the theme of the collaboratively created story, followed by the suggestion "driving a truck" to find moose to hunt. Mrs. Jenny then asked what to include next in the story, and one child responded by saying, "See a moose!" Following this suggestion, another child said, "Shoot the moose," while another suggested the act of first getting out of the truck before shooting the moose: "Wait, I know. Get out of the truck and shoot the moose." Mrs. Jenny settled on the sentence, "Get out and shoot the moose," to reconcile the various suggestions offered by the children. One child then suggested that Mrs. Jenny draw "a gun" and quickly changed his mind, saying, "I mean, [a] guy." Mrs. Jenny drew both "a guy and his gun," which presumably signified the hunter with a gun. Upon establishing that the moose was shot by the hunter, subsequent suggestions included hanging the moose up, skinning the moose, frying the moose, and, ultimately, eating the moose. All of these suggestions, however, did not make it into their collaborative story.

During the collaborative writing experience, Mrs. Jenny also used her position as teacher to shape notions of what is acceptable in mainstream classroom writing. Negotiations of story events throughout the collaborative story writing process were also prompted by what may have been deemed "socially acceptable" by Mrs. Jenny, albeit through a Eurocentric lens. For instance, when children suggested that blood should be included in the illustration of story events after the moose had been shot by the hunter (e.g., "Now we have to make some blood," "Put some blood," and "Where is the blood?"), Mrs. Jenny paused to ponder a moment then quickly veered to the end of the story to avoid the inclusion of blood in her illustrations of the dead moose and, instead, suggested, "Let's eat the moose; how about that?" After receiving affirmation from the children (e.g., "Yeah!"), she incorporated the sentence "Time to eat" and drew a frying pan with moose meat inside the pan. It was not until the moose meat was in the frying pan that she said, while thinking aloud, "Well, I guess there should be a little bit of blood on the [moose] meat." The children agreed, cheering "Yeah!" in excitement. Mrs. Jenny then drew some blood with red marker on the moose meat in the frying pan with a small butter packet to add as a final touch to her drawing. She then concluded the collaborative authorship process by saying, "And here is the story."

When children wrote their own stories, however, Mrs. Jenny accepted the inclusion of details about blood and dead animal carcasses. Some children drew bloodied moose carcasses while hanging dead moose up to drain its blood, skinning the moose, or cutting moose up in preparation for cooking. Another child drew a moose running away after hearing a gun shot. Many children, however, made sound effects and talked about the various phases involved in the preparation of the moose meat while drawing and writing. One child, for instance, while reading his story aloud paused to say, "this is the blood!" and his peer responded with enthusiasm saying, "yeah, blood – blah!" Another child, while reading his story aloud said, "hang the moose up!" after the moose was shot.

Anishinaabek scholar Little Bear (2000) describes the Anishinaabek worldview as recognizing that all things are animate and imbued with spirit, cyclical, and in constant motion or flux. This worldview was visible in a story where a child told her story using an empathetic tone of voice and included characters in the story that were directly related to the moose and not the hunter, such as the moose's friends, its mother, and a baby moose. This was most evident when she read the following part of her story: "That's the moose's body. That's the moose hanging. That's the moose standing. Those two are the moose's friends. That's a mommy moose, and that's the baby moose," using her gestures to indicate that the dead moose's friends, partner, and calf (baby moose) had observed their loved one, that is, the dead moose (father moose), become a hunter's prey. Unlike the story collaboratively written where hunting was described from the hunter's standpoint and thus depicted a sense of gain in the end, especially when the dead moose became food for the hunter(s), in this case, the child put forward a story of losing a member of the moose community and, in turn, a broader ecosystem.

With the exception of one child, who made a reference in his story to "bad guys" being chased by policemen, the Anishinaabek children in Mrs. Jenny's classroom did not draw from popular culture in their multimodal stories. The absence of popular culture themes, characters, and storylines is remarkable, given the widespread observance of such content in young children's multimodal texts in southern, urban, non-Indigenous classrooms (e.g., Dyson, 2013; Wohlwend, 2011). In this respect, Mrs. Jenny's pedagogical practices have created space for Anishinaabek voices, knowledge, and practices to be included and valued in teaching writing.

Highlighting the Multimodal Meaning-Making of Text Creation

Mrs. Jenny emphasized the value of both the process and product of collaborative writing and children's individual writing, highlighting various modes of communication (e.g., verbal, print, visual, audible, and action modes). She often modeled mark-making, drawing, and even sounding out words to communicate meaning through print. When one child, for instance, offered the suggestion, "Let's go hunting," Mrs. Jenny proceeded to model the age-appropriate literate behaviour of mark-making to communicate meaning by placing zigzags at the top of the page with an orange marker while verbally stretching the sounds out for each intended word in the given sentence. Her acceptance of a wide range of symbols and invented spelling is consistent with research showing that young children's developing knowledge of concepts of print supports symbolic communication (Anning, 2003) and that invented spelling provides a foundation for conventional writing (Gerde et al., 2012).

As Mrs. Jenny modeled this behaviour, each child leaned over the table or stood up from their seat to observe intently, highlighting the modes of gaze and action. Figure 1 displays children's active participation during the literacy event, where they used the auditory, visual, and action modes to observe the process of mark-making to communicate meaning.

Figure 1

Children Observing the Process of Mark-Making to Communicate Meaning

Mrs. Jenny's collaborative story-writing task provided space for children to explore ideas verbally with feedback from Mrs. Jenny and their peers. This exploratory talk helped children to clarify and deepen their meaning-making (Barnes, 2008; Mercer & Dawes, 2008). In the collaborative story writing, for example, Mrs. Jenny invited children's verbal input by asking questions such as, "What are we going to say on page one?" "What's next?" "What is happening here?" or "What am I going to draw now?" When children's contributions were unclear to Mrs. Jenny, she asked questions to invite further exploration of what children intended to communicate. For instance, when a child offered the suggestion, "hunting in a truck!" without providing information about how the hunting could take place in a truck, Mrs. Jenny first repeated what the child said, asking the child, "In the truck?" She followed up by asking the child, "Are we hunting in the truck or are we going to go hunting and drive the truck?" The child selected the option that clarified what he intended to say: "driving the truck." Mrs. Jenny then offered a final suggestion from this negotiation, "Okay, how about... 'Get in the truck?'" and only included this negotiated sentence within the story upon receiving the child's affirmation, "Yeah!" The collaborative writing, together with the follow-up independent writing that encouraged talk amongst children and the teacher, provided a comfortable forum for children to explore and learn through language (Barnes, 2008; Mercer & Dawes, 2008). The children and their abilities were viewed through an asset lens.

After placing marks on the page to represent each intended sentence, Mrs. Jenny modeled the self-talk that has been shown to support thinking and problem-solving in literacy and other tasks (Cekaite et al., 2014). At times, Mrs. Jenny made comments while drawing, such as "I am going to draw some grass," "I'm going to draw a picture of a truck," or even "I'm now going to draw the moose," as a way of planning out her next steps. At other times, Mrs. Jenny verbally labeled the different components of the drawing, making comments such as "That's the face, neck, legs" or "that's the grass" and using gestures to point at the various items she is labeling. Sociocultural theorists, such as Vygotsky (1986), explain that talk is a means by which children make sense of the world, as "thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them" (p. 218). In this way, Mrs. Jenny modeled a process that would support children's thinking and problem-solving to work through the challenges of representing their stories symbolically on the page.

Children offered a variety of verbal suggestions during the collaborative story-crafting process, notably using them to capture Mrs. Jenny's attention and instruct others. One child, for instance, used the command "put some blood!" during the collaborative writing interactions, indicating that the drawing needed to include blood in the part when the moose was shot. Ultimately, due to the nature of the interactions, the children used language to negotiate content that would be included in the story, especially since there were many situations where

two children provided conflicting suggestions. In this respect, Mrs. Jenny's pedagogy fostered what Boyd and Galda (2011) call "real talk" for a range of social intentions.

Roles of Talk, Print, and Nonverbal Communication in Students' Text Creation

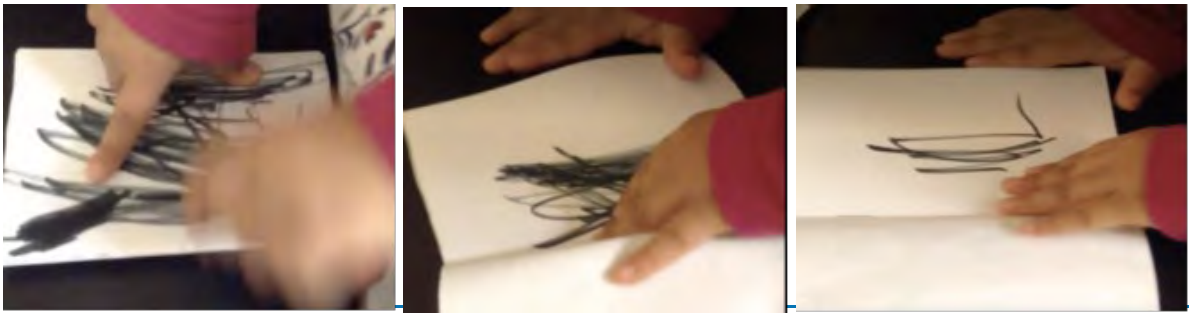
Upon completion of the collaborative story crafting process, the children crafted their own stories, drawing upon multiple modes to make and communicate meaning, as described in the following section.

Text Creation Process Involved Various Communication Modes

As in previous research, children expressed their intended meanings visually through drawing clues (e.g., relative size and position of objects or use of different colours for objects). Upon observing videos of children reading their stories aloud, we noted their usage of various modes (e.g., talk, intonation, sound effects, gestures) beyond print and drawing clues (e.g., relative size and position of objects or use of different colours for objects) to communicate intended meanings (Peterson & Friedrich, 2022). For instance, one child used sound effects to enhance the storytelling and provide details about the sounds characters made, such as when one character said, "Blah!" upon seeing the blood on the moose after it was shot or when one character said "num num" to provide the sound effect of eating when it was time to eat the hunted moose for supper. Another child used an empathetic tone of voice to indicate that the moose's family was sad upon losing a member of their moose family, while another child primarily used talk with gestures (e.g., pointing) to provide details of objects (e.g., an invisible chair) that were not provided in print. Another child read the story using repetition for emphasis, saying, "Shoot the moose! Let's Go! Stop!" three times for each image drawn, yet made each black circular image drawn on each page a different size, appearing to indicate that the circular images were multiple different moose. Figure 2 illustrates the three images drawn to illustrate the hunting and food provision of three separate moose.

Figure 2

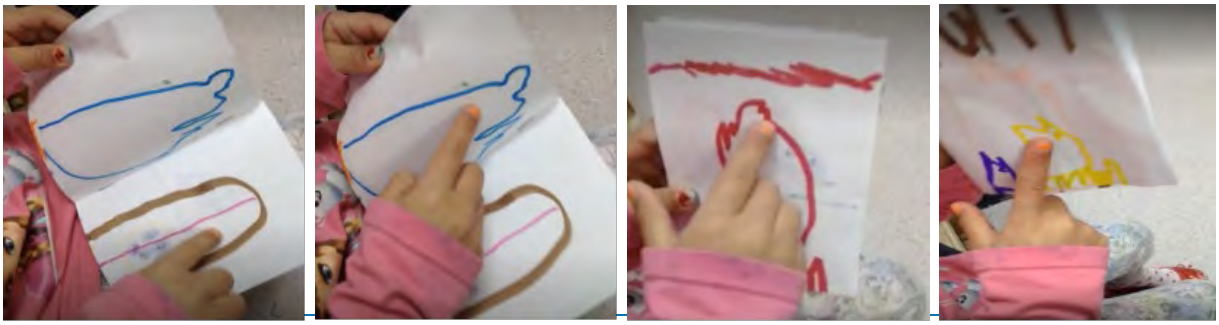
A Child's Mark-Making of Three Different Moose During a Hunting Event in Her Story



Another child used colour to distinguish multiple moose she introduced in her story (see Figure 3). For example, she used a brown marker to illustrate a moose that was shot and hung by a male hunter, a blue marker to show the friends of the dead moose, and a yellow and purple marker to illustrate a mommy and baby moose, respectively. Using different colours was particularly helpful. as it provided readers/viewers of the texts with visual cues to identify the different items, characters, and their role(s) in the various stories.

Figure 3

A Child Using Various Colours to Distinguish One Item or Character from Another



Because children's stories were typically represented symbolically on paper using drawings, scribbles, dots, and letter-like formations with little conventional print, children used their imaginations to read aloud their stories. One child, for instance, decided to draw only a green border on several pages that were then stapled together. When "reading" his story aloud, he predominantly described the invisible characters (e.g., "invisible guys") and objects (e.g., "invisible chairs") within his story, which most certainly encouraged the use of our imagination and a deeper engagement with the potential storyline (Marchiggins, 2013). Children also drew on their memories of what they had intended and their personal experiences to read their stories aloud, much as they would in storytelling. For example, one child said, "My dad shoots a moose by self." One child included dialogue for his father when reading his story aloud: "'Where are the moose?' my daddy said."

Conclusions and Implications

Cultural Meanings

In their collaborative story creation and in the children's own text creation, Mrs. Jenny and the children took up Anishinaabek land- and oral tradition-based cultural knowledge alongside mainstream curriculum expectations regarding children's literacy learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). The topic of moose hunting was clearly part of the children's real-life community experience. Their contributions to the collaboratively written text and to their own texts showed extensive knowledge about moose hunting and the preparation of moose for the

community's use (e.g., food, use of moose hide). They talked about hanging the moose up, skinning the moose, frying the moose, and, ultimately, eating the moose. Mrs. Jenny valued children's funds of knowledge by including most of their recommendations during the collaborative story making process and offering opportunities to include ideas that were not taken up collaboratively within their own individual stories. We argue that the children demonstrated pride in their Anishinaabek culture and identities by showcasing their cultural knowledge while reading their individual texts to the class.

We acknowledge limitations in our data's scope for concluding the relationship between children's experiences and identity formation, emphasizing the necessity of longitudinal ethnographic research to track cultural, literacy learning, and identity development over a school year. Consulting an elder or knowledge keeper from the community is essential to analyze the data and identify evidence of children's identity construction in their talk and text.

Although one child referenced "the bad guys," there was a notable absence of themes and characters of popular culture, which can be taken as evidence of children's resistance to official curricula celebrated by researchers in southern urban contexts (e.g., Genishi & Dyson, 2014). In agreement with Anishinaabek knowledge keeper Laura Horton (Peterson & Horton, 2019), we prioritize Anishinaabek children taking pride in their culture over replicating elements of mainstream society, including popular culture. We argue that encouraging children to talk and write about personal experiences reflective of Anishinaabek culture, like moose hunting, is a decolonizing practice that resists mainstream views of appropriate classroom writing content (Battiste, 2013). It is widely recognized that children's strong sense of identity and pride in who they are set important foundations for supporting children's learning (Battiste, 2013; Toulouse, 2011).

Mrs. Jenny's decision-making during the collaborative writing activity appears to have been influenced briefly by these mainstream views. She initially hesitated about accepting the children's suggestion of including images of bloodied moose carcasses that were certain to be in evidence after the moose was shot. In fact, she reworded the children's suggested sentences so there was no mention of or drawings that reflected blood on the moose. However, towards the end of their collaborative story crafting, while preparing moose meat for supper, Mrs. Jenny adjusted her initial stance to include "blood" on the meat frying in the pan with butter. Mrs. Jenny neither praised nor condemned the children's inclusion of blood in their texts; she offered no comments on it. Despite intending to create space for children to draw on their Anishinaabek community's cultural practices, Mrs. Jenny encountered short-term conflict reflecting the influence of mainstream perspectives. Although our data sources are limited in that we did not interview Mrs. Jenny about her decision-making (and she has retired, so we are not able to contact her now), it appears that Mrs. Jenny carried out an internal debate on the

role that mainstream and Anishinaabek views of appropriate writing topics in kindergarten should have on teaching and learning practices in her classroom. Recognizing the significance of understanding Mrs. Jenny's thought process during her reversal of the children's suggestions about the moose's blood, we suggest that future research on the negotiation of two cultures in Indigenous teachers' classroom practice could benefit from broader data sources, such as retrospective think-alouds.

Multimodalities and Meaning-Making

As in previous research (Peterson & Friedrich, 2022), Mrs. Jenny communicated an expectation that children could create meaningful texts, taking up established views of early writing encompassing various symbols that children imbue with meaning, including scribbles, lines, letters, letter-like forms, and/or drawings (Anning, 2003; Lancaster, 2007). All children in the kindergarten classroom read the texts they had created, communicating information about moose hunting experiences and the associated process. They read from booklets containing drawings and letters, others with scribbles and drawings, and even one with blank pages framed by a coloured border.

Multiple modes of meaning-making in children's reading-aloud of their individually created texts were valued as literacy practices. For example, children used gestures and sound effects to captivate both their peers and Mrs. Jenny while reading their texts, demonstrating a keen awareness of their audience. This practice, which often involved imaginative storytelling and drawing upon background knowledge due to the absence of conventionally spelled words, aligns with cultural storytelling traditions from their Anishinaabek heritage (Marchiggins, 2013; Toulouse, 2016). In addition to the modes associated with storytelling, children also used available materials and knowledge about symbolic representation to create texts (Kress, 1997). As in previous research, children used the relative size, position, and colour of objects in their drawings to emphasize and differentiate characters, actions, and themes (Peterson & Friedrich, 2022). Meaning and achieving intended social intentions were at the forefront of children's multimodal text creation and their reading aloud of their texts. In the process of drawing on their Anishinaabek cultural knowledge, together with knowledge about the meaning-making possibilities in drawings and the use of print and print-like symbols, as well as their knowledge of ways to engage audiences in oral storytelling/reading, we believe children were creating strong literate and Anishinaabek identities.

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