

Chapter 11

Collaborative Pedagogies: Seeking and Finding Truth Within Indigenous Children's Literature Through Multiliteracies



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Photographer: Anne Burke

Abstract In this chapter, we highlight the work of two teachers as they engaged in collaborative practice while designing a curriculum that incorporated Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing through a multiliteracies approach. We describe how these teachers used postcolonial Indigenous children's literature as a launching point to explore historical and critical issues of Indigenous peoples with their

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students in an elementary classroom. We use data generated from interviews, focus group discussions, children's drawings, journal writings, and photographs of classroom sessions. Using a multiliteracies pedagogical framework (situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformative practice), we show how these teachers transformed their practice and students' understandings as they participated in learning events together. We also share some possible practices for incorporating Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing into elementary classrooms. In conclusion, we discuss implications for teachers' practice and the need for further research as we continue the important work towards truth and reconciliation.

Keywords Collaborative teaching pedagogies · Indigenous Children's literature · Multiliteracies · Government policy · Canada

11.1 Introduction

"One of the things that I was afraid that would come up in class was around the sexual abuse of Indigenous children in Residential schools. I found a YouTube video resource about residential schools and found myself skipping over that part because I knew that they would be upset and would ask me why abuse happened?"

– Teacher

In a CBC TV interview on the day of his retirement, Canadian Indigenous Senator and Chief Justice of Canada, Murray Sinclair, acknowledged that teachers have a beginning awareness of the history of Indigenous peoples since the Truth and Reconciliation Report was released in 2015. In this chapter, we acknowledge the struggles of teachers in finding the truth about the history of Canadian Indigenous peoples and teaching young children about the atrocities that were put upon Indigenous peoples. In the words of Chief Justice Sinclair, "Reconciliation is not an aboriginal problem – it is a Canadian problem. It involves all of us." These words embrace the difficult decisions teachers have faced in addressing such injustices with children in their classrooms.

Our conversations with Canadian teachers share researcher Fournier-Sylvester's (2013) observation that "teachers often shy away from... discussions [of controversial issues] because they do not feel like they have the knowledge or skills to work through complex social and political issues. Many teachers also report feeling ill-equipped to deal with the unpredictability of student reactions as well as being concerned about accusations of trying to push a political agenda." (p. 1). While our findings are similar, with the curricular expectations placed upon teachers to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation report, we observed that teachers often struggle to teach controversial history even though they believe that social justice education for Indigenous peoples has measurable positive benefits for students (e.g., critical thinking, tolerance) (Fournier-Sylvester, 2013). Another challenge that teachers may encounter is a lack of appropriate resources that address particular events in history (Burke et al. (2017)).

Similar to current research, we observed in our study that there are specific strategies which the educators adopt when it comes to teaching controversial or sensitive issues. Some teachers may choose not to address these issues or provide the

information directly from the textbook without inviting further discussion or offering students different perspectives and inviting students to think deeply about the issues presented (Kello, 2016).

The official curriculum may also constrain teachers. According to Higgins et al. (2015), “There is a growing consensus within Indigenous educational literature in Canada that most white teachers deliver a curriculum that is reflective of and is shaped by Eurocentrism and whiteness” (p. 251). It is only recently, for example, that there have been commitments to teaching the history of residential schools in some Canadian classrooms. For teachers, this means developing resources and learning to engage in difficult subject matter with their students.

One way to introduce such issues is through the use of postcolonial literature. In this study, the focus was on Canadian Indigenous history and social issues. Such texts provide teachers and students with ways to engage in conversations that vary from traditional Eurocentric literature often used in the classroom (Wiltse et al., 2014). However, just introducing these texts is not sufficient to increase understanding among students. This is among the challenges that teachers, like the ones in this study, encounter when taking up difficult historical wrongs endured by Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Much of our focus was around Canada’s residential school system for Indigenous children and the widespread suffering that this system inflicted on children and families. Canada has a dark history of injustices against its Indigenous people, ignored until the late 2000s when the federal government convened a Commission to explore and expose these issues. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC 2015a) released an official report about such injustices in 2015. The report was 7 years in the making and based on the accounts of witnesses and survivors of the residential school system and described the forced assimilation within this system. In 1876, Canada introduced “the Indian Act,” which was a formal cultural assimilation policy that, among other things, created residential schools, dissolved Indigenous governments (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), banned traditional ceremonies and dress, and generally ignored the rights of Indigenous people (Moore et al., 2019). The residential schools were a particularly cruel part of this act, deliberately stripping the cultural identity of Indigenous children. When at the schools, children were forced to wear uniforms, speak English, and were separated from their siblings. Indigenous children also often had their traditional names taken away, as well as their belongings. In addition to these injustices, the conditions of the schools were horrendous, having been described as unsanitary, poorly made, overcrowded, and ranked with neglect and abuse (Moore et al., 2019). The report by the TRC had 7000 survivors describe the conditions of the schools, including descriptions of rampant physical and sexual abuse that took place (Puxley, 2015). These schools existed all across Canada and in Newfoundland (which was not a Canadian province for much of this time but had its residential schools). Justice Murray Sinclair, a chair of the TRC, has guessed that the number of deaths was likely as high as 6000 of the 150,000 children who were sent to these schools, which means that around 1/25 children at these schools died. Some of the recorded causes of death were tuberculosis, measles, influenza, and smallpox; however, some

children were classified as missing or discharged. Some parents never even found out what happened to their children (Puxley, 2015).

The residential school system has had lasting adverse effects on Indigenous communities. The Indigenous population has disproportionately high poverty rates, incarceration, children in foster care, and missing and murdered women. Justice Sinclair says that all of these issues can be traced back to the residential school system. As such, many Indigenous advocates have suggested that it is important that the Canadian government and Canadian people become active participants in the process of reconciliation. Justice Sinclair has identified many important actions that need to occur as part of reconciliation, including government and church apologies and improving Indigenous children's general quality of life (Puxley, 2015).

In today's classrooms, teachers have the challenging task of designing and enacting curriculum through a lens of social justice. In this chapter, we explore the events that occurred in a grade 5 classroom to examine the role of teacher collaboration in teaching for social justice. Specifically, we consider how two teachers worked collaboratively to create lessons using a multiliteracies framework. Multiliteracies refer to navigating and manipulating various communications channels and media that transcends cultural and linguistic diversity (The New London Group, 1996). Multiliteracies include a variety of modes that can be used to make meaning, including words, images, gestures, movement, objects, and sounds.

They designed learning events around the Indigenous children's book *Shi Shi Etko* by Nicola Campbell and LaFave (2005), and their collaboration became a critical element of their curriculum design. The children's book, *Shi Shi Etko*, is a story of a young Inuit girl before she is taken from her family and sent to a residential school. Our chapter considers how teachers can overcome challenges through innovative pedagogical approaches when engaging in collaborative teaching framed within multiliteracies (situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformative practice). We show how teacher collaboration created new possibilities for engaging children in learning about difficult yet important historical facts about Indigenous peoples in Canada.

11.2 Collaborative Practice and Multiliteracies Pedagogy

This study draws broadly from the research on teacher collaboration (Hargreaves, 2019; Henning, 2013; Jones & Harris, 2012; Rivera et al., 2014; Villavicencio et al., 2020) and is informed by multiliteracies pedagogy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Teacher collaboration refers to formal and informal meetings between and among teachers, focusing on developing effective practice (Hargreaves, 1995; Villavicencio et al., 2020). Collaboration among teachers can provide a more enriching environment for students, wherein students experience multiple perspectives on the content being taught (Jones & Harris, 2012). Teachers can also benefit from the knowledge and expertise of their peers (Jones & Harris, 2012). However, these positive benefits

are dependent on teachers collaborating and communicating effectively. In this study, two teachers, one early-career teacher and one mid-career teacher with over 15 years of classroom experience worked earnestly to share perspectives and resources to engage in difficult discussions with students about residential schools.

Literacy enables people to negotiate meaning (Leland & Kasten, 2002), and is not limited to a set of learned conventions through print or technological formats (Boche, 2014).

The term multiliteracies emerged from the 1990s by the New London Group (1996) to portray “literacy as a continual, supplemental, and enhancing or modifying established literacy teaching and learning” (Boche, 2014. Pg.116). Multiliteracies were a response to advancements in emergent global trends, including the proliferation of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and increasing linguistic and cultural diversity (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). They influence people to become literate in different forms of languages for various social contexts. With this said, the two teachers collaborated with a plethora of texts to better understand the cultural contexts and sociological implications of residential schools.

The New London Group (1996) extended their definition of multiliteracies to include pragmatic pedagogic strategies that can support students in developing competencies in the multiliteracies framework. Our understanding of multiliteracies pedagogy portrays it as a pedagogical strategy designed to promote engagement between learners while focusing on their background and interests so that they are more prepared to engage with complex societal issues. Kulju et al. (2018) argue that critical reflections from the multiliteracy approach become necessary better to understand multiliteracies and its role in teaching and learning. The change results from rapidly evolving technological, societal, economic, and cultural influences on the curriculum’s literacy resources (Kulju et al., 2018). We were interested in exploring meaning-making framed within the four components of situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformative practice as students engaged with postcolonial texts reflecting Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. In this case, we will show how students in a grade 5 classroom engaged with diverse types of texts with Indigenous pedagogies (Cole, 2019; McGregor, 2017), such as using a talking stick and the blanket exercise. This chapter aims to show how the two teachers collaborated in delivering indigenous pedagogies through multiliteracies. In the next section, we discuss the methods and data sources used in the study.

11.3 Research Design and Methods

This chapter draws from research supported by the Canadian Social Sciences & Humanities investigating the use of postcolonial children’s literature in the classroom. The study involved over 100 classroom teachers in Canada. This chapter focuses on a teacher inquiry group of 15 teachers in Eastern Canada who focused their collaborative inquiry exploration of Indigenous children’s picture books. This powerful literary genre has grown extensively in the past 5 years in Canada.

Postcolonial literary texts such as these can provide a dynamic lens for children and educators to seek truth and further understand social justice's intricacies. Johnston (2012), a Canadian postcolonial children's scholar shares "postcolonial texts invite teachers and students to consider the intersections of the aesthetic and political" (p.197). In particular, teachers were emotionally invested and committed to finding topical books to ensure that difficult truths such as the Canadian shame of residential schools addressed such an intersection.

Most importantly, the choice of Nicola Campbell's book *Shi Shi Etko* (2005) introduced children to this tragic part of Canadian history. The gentle re-telling about residential schools in this book gave way to understanding for the students about indigenous families and cultural experiences through the main character. Children were witnessed taking agency and giving voice to a tragic and hidden part of Canadian history. Developing Indigenous pedagogies within their classrooms was essential for the teachers in their journey to correct the wrongdoing through the past teachings about Indigenous peoples in Canada. Teacher research is a systematic process by which teachers identify 'problems' in their practice within the context of their classroom learning environments and investigate ways to address these problems through inquiry (Chow et al., 2015; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Evidently, teacher research seems to positively impact the professional competence of educators since research is a critical and integral part of an educator's professional development (Furlong & Salisbury, 2005). Both teachers in this study, who were at different stages of their career, shared how collaborating meant that they could discuss their learning journey and the new and older pedagogies they would try out in their grade five classrooms.

Although it is vital to consider these teachers' perspectives as they collaborated, it is also essential to consider their willingness to engage as co-researchers and co-learners along with their students. These teachers were committed to learning alongside their students—reading new books and learning about topics they had little background knowledge. For them, they saw Indigenous children's literature as both a mirror and a window and understood that looking in the mirror would be a particularly challenging undertaking. As one of our teachers shared with Anne, "after reading the children's Indigenous books you brought to our class, I wondered why it (Reconciliation) was not formally in the Newfoundland curriculum." These teachers also recognized the need to provide a supportive environment for the children in their classrooms for these difficult conversations and inner struggles.

The data collection for what we share in this chapter took place over a year with bi-weekly classroom visits at one elementary school with a population of 500 students. Upon receiving ethical approval from our university and the school district, the team met with the school's administration team and staff. We provided an overview of the study and shared a collection of 80 picture books that addressed many social issues such as poverty, bullying, racism, immigration, and Indigenous issues, ranging from residential schools to missing women. Teachers asked questions and examined the research book collection. Three grade five teachers, two grade two teachers, and two grade six teachers volunteered to explore the postcolonial picture books in their classrooms. For this chapter, we focus on two

teachers who collaborated and shared the book *Shi Shi Ekto* in teaching a unit on residential schools.

Over the year, we generated data from children's drawings, journal writings, photographs of classroom sessions. We held two focus group discussions with the children and interviewed the teachers separately and together. The data collection was rich in multimodal texts; as a result, we chose to use a digital visual literacy analysis method of developing what Hull and Katz (2006) a "pictorial and textual representation of those elements" that is creating a graph representation of all data "that is juxtaposing columns of the written text, the images from digital texts, and the data from interviews, field notes, and pictures to create "qualitative analysis of patterns" (p.41). The rich data set with the various multimodal texts was well suited to be considered within multiliteracies pedagogies.

11.4 Indigenous Knowledges and Multiliteracies Pedagogies

The TRC Calls to Action prompted educators to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing and teaching methods into their practice (TRCC: Calls to Action, 2015). However, teachers, even those in this study who are committed to equity and social justice, may experience some discomfort when integrating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into their curriculum and practice. They may feel that their knowledge of Indigenous topics is limited or fear they will say or do something wrong. Some teachers may even believe that only Indigenous peoples are the only ones who can teach about Indigenous histories and topics (Cole, 2019).

Indigenous ways of knowing and doing differ significantly from Western colonial perspectives (Cole, 2019). Knowledges within Indigenous cultures reflect a view of knowing that is situated, contextual, personal, and interconnected with culture, identity, place, and peoples (Cole, 2019; Munroe et al., 2013). This view of knowing is reflected in how these teachers included a talking stick as students shared their responses while learning to make connections through their learning experiences. Knowing also comes from personal and shared experiences. Teachers in this study used the blanket exercise in their elementary classroom as a way for students to deepen their understandings about colonial history by experiencing through a dramatization of how the land was taken away from Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples view land as sacred, shared, and as a teacher (Cole, 2019; McGregor, 2017). Teachers explored these perspectives, particularly the view that land is a teacher and a source of knowledge through the Indigenous children's book *Shi Shi Ekto*, a work of Indigenous children's literature, by Nicola Campbell. Incorporating Indigenous perspectives and knowledges requires self-reflection, learning, and courage to challenge dominant worldviews while engaging in new pedagogical practices (Cole, 2019). Through *Shi Shi Ekto*, students learned about indigenous cultures and history, particularly the Canadian residential school system.

By designing lessons and engaging in new pedagogies, including Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, these teachers transformed their classroom into a space where they could participate actively in the process of decolonization. This was possible through four components of the New London Group (1996) proposed in the multiliteracies pedagogies – situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. Next, we describe how these teachers engaged in reflection and learning as they integrated Indigenous knowledges and methods into their pedagogical practices by using Indigenous children’s literature, talking circles, and the blanket exercise.

11.4.1 *Situated Practice*

We begin with sharing Anne’s field notes on the first day of her data collection in the grade five classroom. The teacher had contacted Anne to discuss how best to begin her discussion about Indigenous peoples in Canada in the following (Fig. 11.1):

Francis sent an email before I was to arrive at the school at 11:00 in the morning. She communicated that she had been up late the night before trying to decide what information video was best to share with her grade 5 class to introduce her teaching unit about Aboriginal Inuit and Metis people of Canada. She was concerned about the labels that remain in Canadian government laws where an Indigenous person is still referenced as an Indian under the “Indian Act.” She decided to introduce these terms by getting students to draw what they thought the word Indian meant. She was surprised to get these drawings:

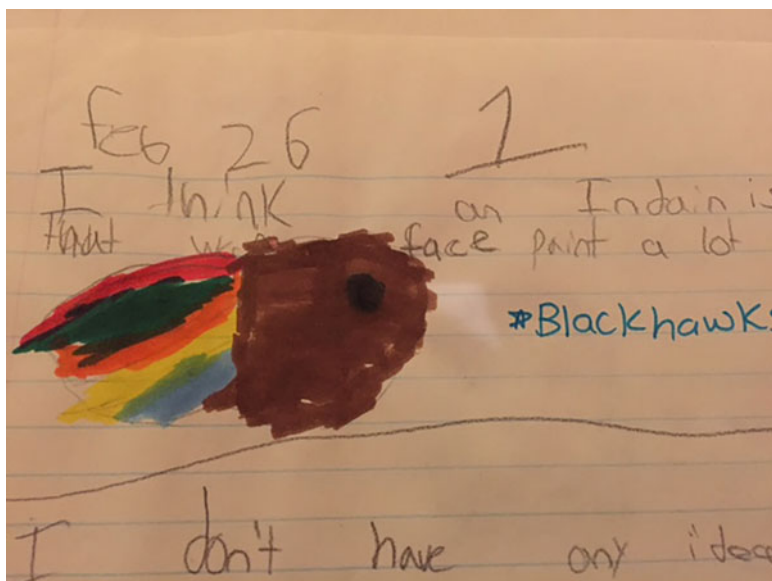


Fig. 11.1 Blackhawk drawing interpretation

In situating the children's learning, she learned about their lived experiences at home. In this drawing, the student writes that an Indian is a person who wears all face paint. His drawing shows the picture of an American professional hockey team logo of the Chicago Blackhawks. He also has written in his paper, "I have no idea." Other children referenced other sports teams, and one child drew a map showing India and said, "Indian people live here; this is where my aunt is from." Teachers were not surprised to read these responses in student journals. One teacher shared, "We do have a unit on Indigenous peoples in our social studies textbook, but the role of the Canadian government in implementing residential schooling is not shared. The book is mostly about customs, livelihood practices and geographical places of aboriginal peoples." In our early discussions with teachers, we realized there was little evidence of authorized or suggested curriculum resources they could draw from at the beginning of the unit.

In this component of the framework, we see how learners participated in activities, which are grounded in learner experiences and interrelationships surrounding their social lives (Westby, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), such as understanding the term "Indian" refers to logo for a sports team or "Indian" to a person from India. As such, learners use available meaning-making resources situated in their life experiences to solve real-world problems they encounter. When we first met teachers, they were mostly concerned about students' ability to understand the purpose of residential schools. Understanding that these schools were intended to colonize Indigenous peoples would be a difficult teaching task. These first steps suggested that more understanding and activities would have to be focused more on addressing the history of colonization.

11.4.2 Overt Instruction

Both teachers were very committed to using the Indigenous books, which gently introduced residential schooling from the child's perspective. One teacher shared that Canadian history is taught in small segments that progress through each grade level to more complex topics that build upon what was previously learned. She shared, "what is currently taught in the classroom is about culture only, nothing about "truth and reconciliation." Another teacher shared, "I had began to talk about *Shi Shi Etko* and realized I needed to get the right words to say to the students," as she did not want to offend students in her class that may be Indigenous. She decided that she did not know enough about how indigenous groups identity themselves. In our interview, she shared:

"What terms are interchangeable if any. I looked at an Indigenous website used by Aboriginal peoples to see how I could explain the difference, such as why we do not use the term "Indian" "but Canada laws still have the Indian Act."

Another concern was involving the school community in understanding the new truths coming forth with the release of the Truth and Reconciliation report. In class

discussions, we noted that children used terms about Aboriginal peoples that their parents and grandparents used. During an interview, the teacher gave a take-home assignment asking children to interview parents and grandparents about their knowledge of Indigenous peoples. There were children of Indigenous ancestry who returned to the class with great knowledge to share. However, she had to be cognizant and respectful of what some children did share:

As the unit progressed, she noted that children thoughtfully corrected themselves or paused when choosing Indigenous people identifiers. In this case, we see how both teachers researched online sources and sharing of websites and videos produced by credible sources. This helped students acquire a new understanding and build more confidence in discussing such weighty issues.

The overt instruction component of multiliteracies pedagogy focuses on the teacher's interventions and the learner's systemic understanding of developed resources. According to Westby (2010), the main goal of overt instruction is to support the metacognition development of learners so that they can gain some measure of autonomy in their learning. With a developed metalanguage, the learners can enhance their meaning-making from available resources to better understand various modes of multiliteracies. These teachers engaged multiple resources and discussions using credible sources such as First Nation websites and Government of Canada resource pages. These activities enabled students to gain a new metalanguage and develop a sense of agency to further research for a culminating project.

11.4.3 Critical Framing

Both teachers firmly believed in viewing content material with an informed critical frame. The viewpoints around the resources and textbook produced questioning about how to teach beyond the current textbook fundamentals, which simply identified Aboriginal peoples through their geographical locations and celebratory customs. The current curriculum did not address residential schools. In using the children's picture book, *Shi Shi Etko* (Campbell & Lafave, 2005) tells the story of a young Indigenous girl, Shi-Shi-Etko, age 6, as she prepares to go to residential school in 4 days. The story takes place in her home community, showing how her family lives on the land and the cultural and life teachings shared with her through her close relationship with her mother, father, and grandmother. Shi-Shi Etko tries to remember all of family teachings to not forget her lived experiences when she leaves for residential school – where she will be forced to lose her name and her language. The theme of family and relationships was an important one in the grade five classroom. Both teachers decided that they would engage in two Indigenous practices to share with children the respect of communication using a talking stick and the blanket exercise, which teaches the history of Indigenous peoples.

Before the lesson began, they talked about how we share our traditions and language at home. This teacher revisited the picture storybook through a page-

turning sharing the illustrations and engaging in a critical discussion using the talking stick. She intertwined facts about Canadian indigenous residential schools as shown in the following:

Anne: Do you remember when you used a talking stick in class last week after you read *Shi-Shi- Etko*? (holding the book to show the pictures as cues to the children).

Joel: Yes, it was used so that we did not all speak at once when Miss was asking questions.

Lauren: (quickly adding) It also made sure we listened to what we were saying.

Anne: I think it is important to listen to everyone's thoughts? Do you agree?

Sienna: I liked that Miss C asked questions to explain the story more.

Anne: How do you mean?

Sienna: When we talked about how the little girl would remember everything that her family taught her from the book... you know the picture (Anne passes her the book, and she shows the picture of the main character with her special memory bag collected with her grandmother). Miss C explained that she had to keep her memories safe inside her because when she got to the school, they would give her another name, and she would not be able to speak her own language or speak about home without being punished.

Anne: How did that make you feel?

Sienna: It made me mad, and I asked Miss why that happened.

The teachers showed several Internet resources that supported students' developing understanding of the atrocities and treatment of Indigenous peoples. These resources helped children understand that the responsibility of all Canadians and apologies on behalf of the Prime Minister could not make up for the losses Indigenous children like *Shi Shi Etko* had experienced.

In critical framing, learners are advised to take a step back and critically analyze the contents of the curriculum within its respective context (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). During this time, teachers found that pairing resources and the Indigenous pedagogical practices can provide a lens for children. With the critical framing component, learners can better understand the design's function (Westby, 2010). As such, students learn to appreciate that there is no simple universal truth that can be applied in all contexts. Rather, learners understand the influence of social contexts in selecting and using available resources for a critical selection of suitable resources in various tasks (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

11.4.4 Transformed Practice

Another practice used to highlight Indigenous perspectives on historical events implemented by these teachers in their classroom were using Kairos blanket exercise activity. This activity consisted of laying blankets on the floors to represent land treaties. The transformed practice component of multiliteracies pedagogies involves activities involving the application of a learner's acquired knowledge into other contexts for problem-solving. Cope & Kalantzis (2000) recommend that learners implement an established design in different contexts characterized by new situations. As such, the blanket exercise invited children to understand the colonization of Indigenous peoples through dramatic enactment.

This particular learning event is intended to help people understand the history of Canada's relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. In this classroom, teachers asked children to bring blankets from home, which were arranged on the floor to represent Canada before the arrival of the Europeans. In class, one teacher and one student read from a script. As the script is read, children playing the roles of Europeans and newcomers begin to interact with Aboriginal peoples enacted by children on the blankets. Blankets are removed from the floor, and children taking on the role of Aboriginal peoples are left standing together on one blanket, symbolizing the loss of land or being taken by death. The script is read as a timeline and helps children understand how, first, the Europeans and the Canadian government's federal policies have colonized the lives of Indigenous peoples. The children pictured here as they participated in the blanket exercise. Further journal entries shared how this pedagogical practice engaged students in understanding the history of loss endured by Indigenous peoples (Fig. 11.2).

Katie shared the following in her journal response:

"The blanket exercise was fun until it was not. I really liked how my class acted as the aboriginal people. Ethan was a narrator with our teacher. I learned how it started out fine until the Europeans turned on them and took their land. A lot of Aboriginal people died from disease. The blankets disappeared, and there was only a few of us left.

Another student shared the following:

When we read the picture book and did the blanket exercise, I started realizing that residential schools made children lose connections with their family language and what they did to survive like gather food.



Fig. 11.2 Blanket exercise

11.5 Teacher Collaboration

Importantly, our interviews with the collaborating teachers stressed the importance of self-education about Indigenous peoples. In later working sessions as a collaborative effort, they were transformative for themselves as educators and their students. Each day during the unit, teachers met and talked about addressing the missing truths from textbooks and the newly found credible resources they had located.

In Anne's field notes, she discussed ways that teachers shared resources and ideas. In one focus group discussion, teachers shared their concerns about seeking resources and justifying why students were not using just the textbook. These are their responses:

Janette: What I like most is how we shared resources and talked about the respect of knowing the past is important and that this story narrative about Canadian truth and reconciliation must be a part of all of us. We talked about it not... just about content but also what we are... teachers... educators who are apart of this narrative. You know what I mean?

Deirdre: Yes after we talked about *Shi Shi Etko* in class we were in here in the lunchroom asking ourselves did the kids in our classrooms actually get it? You know... that Indigenous children lost their language, culture and families in reality. Francis and I decided to ask the kids "Do you learn everything in school"? "Do you learn some things at home that are also important"? Some of them shared "like how to be respectful", "I appreciate what I got", "I appreciate my family and I am so lucky to be raised like this and be who we are", and "I am safe and my family can protect me". What was the hardest for me was when we were in the talking circle. I was sharing the picture book and they kept asking me if this was "really" their social studies lesson. I told them "Yes, social studies is about the struggles of others and learning about the past to make amends". I showed them the talking stick and reminded them the use of the talking stick is way to listen respectfully to others opinions and ideas and learn how we can make a difference- even now.

Similar to this focus group, we found further interviews with teachers revealed that the unit had been a transformative experience for both students and teachers in making pedagogical decisions in addressing the noted absence of Indigenous history in the curriculum. Indigenous pedagogical practices and Indigenous picture books such as *Shi Shi Etko* made for a transformative experience where children made vital connections. One teacher shared this in our interview:

The children made the connection between being good people and what their parents taught them at home. Parents teach many things such as modelling positive relationships and how to care for your siblings. The children did realize that this explains why some Indigenous families can not take care of their own children because they just don't know how, and because they may have suffered abuse in residential schools

Other children shared how they would feel if they were forced to go to residential school, as recorded in their journals (Fig. 11.3):

If I were taken to a residential school I would feel scared and confused.



Fig. 11.3 Drawing of blanket exercise experience

Another shared:

It would make me feel helpless. . . there are adults that are telling you what to do and if you don't then you get hit.

Through teachers' collaborative practice, these educators found the courage to engage in difficult subject matter. They worked collaboratively to design lessons that included Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. They engaged their students in learning experiences where they had opportunities to explore critical issues and histories of Indigenous peoples through their use of Indigenous children's literature, resources, and dialogue. This was a transformative moment that brought greater understanding, for both teachers and students, about the atrocities experienced by Indigenous people. These learning events brought a new understanding of the historical life realities of Indigenous peoples and the social inequities and social justice avenues that must be journeyed for reconciliation. In our interviews with children, some shared that their parents did not have opportunities to learn about assimilation and the abuse of Indigenous children at the hands of the churches. Others mentioned that their parents sought out more information when they brought home their final research project about Indigenous people in Canada. This project also brought forth a new understanding of some of the classroom children's Indigenous family ancestry. Some were from Inuit and Mi'kmaq backgrounds, a hidden piece of ancestry that was welcomed into this transformational experience.

11.6 Implications for Teaching

Drawing from our own learning experiences with teachers in the study, we explore what it means to use a multiliteracies pedagogical framework to view teachers' approaches to teaching social justice in classrooms. In taking a social justice stance, teachers in this study empower learners by critically understanding the transformative experience when engaging a multiliteracies approach through Indigenous pedagogical practices. In particular, we see how this approach brings new learning and understanding about residential school survivors and the impact on family relationships. When literacy and pedagogical practices are widened to include new meta-languages and new multimodal approaches, we can address the calls of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation report (2015b). We share our findings below:

1. The TRC report can be addressed in a more productive way when school curricula are supported through collaborative practice, shared perspectives, resources, and new pedagogies.
2. Indigenous teaching pedagogies were implemented through collaborative teaching practices using an MLS pedagogy where teachers reflected and critically engaged the four sets of practices as a way forward for social justice teaching and reconciliation
3. Through the use of the MLS pedagogy, teachers could gauge children's learning. Students were positioned as capable critical thinkers and agents of change. Teachers critically framed their teaching to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, materials, and resources.

11.7 Conclusion

Our chapter considers the collaborative practice that may be implemented with a multiliteracies framework, Indigenous materials, and pedagogical practices. Although this study highlighted the experiences of two teachers sharing the colonial history of Indigenous people, there remains much reconciliation work to be implemented in Canadian classrooms. Some Indigenous youth, in particular, feel that their best interests are not being honored in education systems (Korteweg & Bissell, 2016). They make explicit their desire for education: to incorporate "Indigenous humanity and diversity," colonial history, "Indigenous knowledge, languages, and worldviews" (Dion, 2016). However, school systems have yet to respond to such aspirations (Dion, 2016). To the detriment of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, there is still a lack of curricular content on Indigenous Peoples and histories (Scully, 2012). The latter results in misconceptions among Canadians of Indigenous Peoples' histories and current realities in Canada (Scully, 2012). Education for reconciliation requires educators to respond to the voices of Indigenous youth (Dion, 2016). Reflecting on this, we see the need for educators to learn from and with Indigenous communities and incorporate "territorially and culturally specific

teachings” in their curriculum (Scully, 2012). Using Indigenous knowledge sharing practices, our multiliteracies pedagogical approach can open new possibilities for reconciliation for Indigenous peoples within elementary classrooms.

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