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'ICEYÉEYE [COYOTE] IS PLAY AND SPORT: INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGIES OF PLAYFUL PEDAGOGY FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING NIIMÍIPUU LANGUAGE AND STORIES.

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Introduction:

When teaching language through storytelling to children, the magic is through the play. Wáaqo' kex weye peẋeeléewis! [Now let's play!]

The two sík'em [horses] facing each other jump up in play, high-fiving each other with their hoofs. The pícpic [cat] plays with the yarn ball. The payóopayoo [birds] twirl in flight, playing against the wind current. Yes, it is true, "All animals play" (Graeber 2014, 3); even 'iceyéeye [Coyote] is always at play and sport. In search of knowledge, 'iceyéeye [Coyote] on a journey wanders around, going upriver. 'iceyéeye is on a nonstop adventure, a sport of sorts. 'iceyéeye is an athlete, getting in shape for the playing of sports.

'iceyéeye (ĭ-tsĕ-yæ-yĕ) can create magical things for his teammates, the Animal People. Imagine 'iceyéeye making a behind-the-back no-look pass assist to his best friend tilípe' [fox], or turning the ball over to tísqe' [skunk], fighting and getting a technical foul. Odds against him, 'iceyéeye can come back to life, like an athlete, and hit that last-second three-pointer buzzer-beater. Swish! Now a hero, 'iceyéeye saves the day, and the Animal People chant, "'iceyéeye! 'iceyéeye! 'iceyéeye!" That was a good game. Now wasn't that fun? This playful story captures the four character types of 'iceyéeye, "Heroes, Tricksters, Monsters, and Caretakers" (Borrows 2016, 825).

As teachers and students, we are 'iceyéeye [Coyotes] at Play and Sport, as we play the game of teaching and learning. 'iceyéeye is down to earth, so-to-speak, as he or she stays connected to the ground, wandering around searching.

'iceyéeye are storytellers and researchers investigating ways of knowing (epistemology) and doing (ontology), methodologies (the theory of how knowledge is gained), axiologies (ethics or morals that guide the search for knowledge) (Wilson 2008), and testing these theories and ways of knowing. These theories inform how I include Indigenous methodologies in teaching to guide playful pedagogy for teachers and students.

The subsequent sections will first provide an overview of my Nimipuutímt [the People's language] teaching and learning experiences and the background and importance of Indigenous Coyote stories, followed by an exploration of Indigenous methodologies, decolonizing, and Playful Pedagogy as a framework for teaching and learning the Niimíipuu language and stories.

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Nimipuutímt [The People's Language] and Learning Experiences

I am Niimíipuu [the People], an enrolled Nez Perce Tribal member. I grew up on the Nez Perce Reservation in Lapwai, Idaho.

My love for learning nimipuutímt [the People's language], like a fluttering butterfly, fancy-danced in my heart in the third grade at Lapwai Elementary. Knowing how to say words in my own language was exciting, and my dancing heart further fluttered with excitement during language games. I was good at it. I felt smart!

In my twenty-eight years as a nimipuutímt teacher, I have witnessed students flutter with excitement, eyes sparkling like stars, engaged and having fun when I teach nimipuutímt through our traditional 'iceyéeye [Coyote] and the Animal People stories. My love for language and storytelling has put me on a journey, wandering here and there, searching for knowledge to find fun ways to teach our language and stories. This is how we as teachers are like 'iceyéeye. We search for Play and Sport in our teaching. We search for creative ways to teach and help the students connect to their gifts of ways of knowing and learning.

However, I recognized the tensions and challenges when teaching 'iceyéeye stories in a colonized space within the confines of a cold, institutional-like feel, caging in 'iceyéeye between the four walls. Many stories are place-based on the land, teaching lessons of how things came to be, like the rock formations of Miss Frog, the Mammoth, and Coyote's son. In the last section, I will share how I applied Play and Sport to teach nimipuutímt through story and other ways of learning language with movement, bodily-kinesthetics, and total physical response.

The Background and Importance of Indigenous Coyote Stories

What are Indigenous Coyote Stories?

I define Indigenous Coyote stories as stories from Indigenous, Tribal, Native Americans, and First Nations people. I also refer to these stories as "Coyote and the Animal People" stories, with the Coyote being the Trickster. However, for other Tribal or First Nations people, Raven or Spider are Tricksters in their stories.

Many of the stories were tied to the land and served as guideposts. According to Indigenous scholar John Borrows (Chippewa of the Nawash First Nation), Indigenous law is the Indigenous Peoples' legal system for dealing with human flaws, regulating behavior, resolving disputes, and having obligations to the natural world, like animals. Narratives or stories are also part of these regulations (Borrows 2016).

Indigenous scholar Aaron Mills (Couchiching First Nation) uses the term "Indigenous lifeworlds" to understand Indigenous law. According to Mills, lifeworlds refer to "ontological, epistemological and cosmological framework," an Indigenous lens or worldview. He contends that "lifeworld begins with creation stories" (Mills, 2016, 850).

As ’iceyéeye, we learn from the virtues and mistakes our teacher, ’iceyéeye, teaches us in the stories (Borrows 2016, 831).

What are the benefits of stories?

When understanding the deeper meanings of the stories, the experience can be transformative and serve as guideposts, build self-esteem, and nurture the spirit with good medicine. In *Teaching Indigenous Languages* for the Fourth Annual Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposium (1997), authors Heredia and Francis added, “Erdoes and Ortiz (1984) refer to the 166 legends that they recorded as productions from the heart and soul of the Native people of North America” (Heredia and Francis 1997, 46).

How did the Colonist Project interrupt Indigenous Peoples’ Way of Life?

The Indigenous People’s way of life included the ’iceyéeye and the Animal People stories, however “these long-standing systems of education that have helped our children learn the full spectrum of what it means to be human, to live ethically, and to take care of one another have been interrupted by colonial models of education” (McCoy et al. 2020, 3). Those models of education included the Indian Boarding schools, which were not in the “Indian” people’s best interest, as the “Colonist Project” was a deliberate design to colonize “Indian” minds to gain access to Indigenous resources (Grande 2008, 4). For example, “Indian children were taken from their parents and forced to go to Boarding Schools” (Kimmerer 2013, 318). Speaking their Native language was forbidden. If caught speaking their language, “their mouths would be washed out with soap, or worse, for talking that “dirty Indian language” (Kimmerer 2013, 50).

Similarly, in Canada, First Nations children were forced to go to Residential Schools in which, Kimmerer (2015) states, “Indigenous everything was erased and replaced with euro-colonial knowledge, values and beliefs” (Absolon 2022a, 45). The violent erasure of our traditional stories/Indigenous knowledge was “an explicit goal of the colonial project at the Indian Residential School projects across Canada with explicit goals to rid the Indian out of the child. These genocide projects sought to eradicate Indigenous knowledge” (Absolon 2022b, 46). When we think about how kids love to play, that spirit of play in hearing and telling stories was also suppressed. All kids deserve to play.

Our oral traditions may have been silent for a while, but today, the stories remain. By telling our stories, we decolonize and once again experience their transformative power.

Exploration of Indigenous Methodologies and Decolonizing

With ’iceyéeye [Coyote] as a teacher, growing up as Niimíipuu [the People], and teaching Niimíipuu students, my cultural background informs me of how our diverse students’ learning is influenced by

their culture and language differences, and the understanding of how their ways of learning can be made more meaningful through different approaches (Wiseman et al. 2005). This led me to expand my creativity in teaching and to consider standards and theories of teaching and learning.

In ethical, culturally responsive, and creative teaching, we recognize and consider the students' cultural learning methodologies and multiple intelligences. Howard Gardner's theory includes eight domains of learning: linguistic or verbal, musical, spatial, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist (Lane 1998; Wiseman et al. 2005). Therefore, it is ethical to implement pedagogy that includes multiple intelligences to reach the students' ways of knowing and learning.

Teaching Niimíipuu and other Native American students, culturally responsive teaching is not only ethical, but it is also more meaningful and effective, as it aligns with the students' ways of knowing. According to the Nez Perce Cultural Standards developed by the Circle of Elders and the Nez Perce Education Department, Niimíipuu students learn through Active Visualization, Community Orientation, Oral History or Storytelling, Learning from Mistakes, Personal Sovereignty, Teachers are Guides, Experiential Learning, Interpersonal Relationships, and Evaluating Mastery. In the development of these standards, Running Horse Livingston (Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa), a consultant on Indigenous pedagogy and culturally responsive curriculum, shared that there is a difference between teaching culture and teaching culturally (Nez Perce Tribe, 2013). Teaching stories culturally to Niimíipuu students aligns with their traditional ways of knowing, learning, and doing. This process involves:

1. **Active Visualization**: Drawing or acting out the story.
2. **Community Orientation**: Learning through story groups and collective knowledge.
3. **Oral History/Storytelling**: Listening to stories as a method of learning.
4. **Experiential Learning**: Telling the story at its original site for a deeper connection.
5. **Evaluating Mastery**: Demonstrating understanding by retelling the stories independently.

This holistic approach integrates the Nez Perce Cultural Standards with hands-on learning methods, and the story and language teaching and learning also align with Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences: linguistic or verbal, musical, spatial, and bodily-kinesthetic (Lane 1998; Wiseman et al. 2005).

Indigenous land-based pedagogy of language and stories is where teaching culturally is experienced most profoundly. The unnatural settings of learning the language through the stories while within the confines of a colonized institution are problematic because they fail to offer experiential learning in the natural setting, developing a relationship with the stories from the land, which is a living being, a teacher, and an interlocutor (Engman and Hermes 2019).

Teaching the language and stories in natural settings reconnects the Niimíipuu to the land, and learning becomes more powerful. Indigenous scholar Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) teaches that there is power in place when we Indigenize our teaching philosophy. Therefore, when we reclaim teaching the language and stories in their natural, usual, and accustomed place on the land, we Indigenize our Play and Sport pedagogy with our philosophy of land-based learning. Furthermore, "Indigenous societies have long practiced forms of education in which land-based, play-based, intergenerational, and applied learning strategies have helped the next generation learn what it means to live in ethical and sustainable relationship with all living beings" (McCoy et al. 2020, 3).

Describing Playful Pedagogy:

As language teachers, we are always looking for innovative language teaching methods, such as teaching the language through stories in which "learning Indigenous law can heighten the ability and the motivation to learn the Indigenous language of which the law is a part" (Borrows 2016, 810). The Niimíipuu have rich resources, including a plethora of Niimíipuu oral narratives (primarily 'iceyéeye stories) written in Nimipuutímt and English. Teaching the language through the stories grabs students' attention, and they become active participants in the retelling. For example, I become very animated when telling a story, making the students laugh. I have the students retell the story, and they take on different characters when re-enacting it. The students often use some of the same inflections and expressions I used during the initial storytelling.

Imagination as Play and Sport

Wáaqo' kex weye peẋeeléewis! [Now let's play!] Imagine the nimipuutímt word, hiweyéhnece [snow is coming down]. Standing in front of the class, I demonstrate to the young Coyotes, raising my "paws" into the air and starting to the right, then zig-zagging to the left, back and forth with my hands while saying the word hi-we-yéh-ne-ce with each syllable of the word represented by movement with my "paws." We repeat this word and use bodily kinesthetics with Total Physical Response (TPR), which uses physical movement to teach verbs (Total Physical Response (TPR) http://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/total-physical-response-tpr). The students, the young 'iceyéeye, use their imaginations to apply the Play pedagogy, embodying the movement of snow falling to the ground. The kids-in-play repeat with me the word hiweyéhnece until our bodies are crouched all the way down to the ground.

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Then I teach them that once the falling snow touches the ground, we call it by the noun or name meeqe' [snow]. Now the game of imagination, Play and Sport, builds in excitement when I instruct the students to place their 'ípsus [hands] into the meeqe' and make a méeqe'nim poxpok'ála [snowball]. I then command them, 'etuleyléekitx méeqe'nim poxpok'ála! [Throw the snowballs]! We repeat the words méeqe'nim poxpok'ála as we throw our imaginary snowballs at each other. With the continuous repetition of the word and making imaginary méeqe'nim poxpok'ála, we duck and hide our faces to prevent us from being hit by the imaginary méeqe'nim poxpok'ála. Some pretend that they got blasted in the face with the méeqe'nim poxpok'ála. The students with glistening eyes, smiles, laughter, and rosy cheeks, having fun, experiencing Play and Sport, get worked up in this workout. They then yell, "Let's do it again!" It never fails, year after year; the young 'iceyéeye love this.

Indigenous Land-Based Pedagogies and Decolonizing in Play and Sport:

The decolonizing practices include restoring relationships to the language, land, and stories through Indigenous land-based pedagogies and reclamation of cultural knowledge and ways of knowing. The Nez Perce Cultural Standards (NPCS) are also addressed here as they demonstrate cultural ways of knowing and doing.

Playful Pedagogy for Teaching and Learning Niimíipuu Language and Stories was an embodied educational experience by the students in play and sport during field trips to these story sites.

In the classroom, I told the students the story of *Hay'óoxchacwal kaa Hinméet* [Cottontail Boy and Thunder] (Watters and Walker, 1967). This was done in preparation for the Play and Sport field trip in the outdoor classroom. During the storytelling, I take on the roles of each character. This is Play

and Sport because a lot of energy and movement—bodily kinesthetics—is put into telling the stories. Play in teaching comes alive when I add sound effects in the storytelling. I have fun telling the stories that create a playful learning environment. Sometimes I put on my ’iceyéeye mask and use props. I use key Nimipuutímt words during the storytelling combined with TPR.

Key Nimipuutímt words are written on the whiteboard. I add some quickly drawn illustrations for the students to connect meaning with TPR, spatial intelligence, and Active Visualization during the storytelling. After the storytelling, the students join their peer story groups (Community Orientation). Collectively, the students exercise agency as they embody ’iceyéeye searching for knowledge on retelling the story.

In each story group, the students draw what they remember and write key nimipuutímt words (linguistic/verbal) from the story. The students connect the pictures to the stories (TPR), and some students show great abilities in their spatial intelligence as artists.

Each story group discusses what they feel the lessons are from the story. The students are empowered by experiencing their sovereignty and self-determination of what the story means to them. Then I share my thoughts on what I have learned from the story. It is important to have the students discuss the story's meanings with each other first, to avoid giving them a prescribed lesson about the story. Each story group presents their story work to the whole class, demonstrating Storytelling and Evaluating Mastery.

In class the next day, I did a quick one-minute tell-all of the story, sounding like an auctioneer or those medical prescription commercials that provide the warnings in a fast-forward pace. It was entertaining and fun. If it wasn’t fun, then what’s the point, right?

We then practice some key nimipuutímt words and songs or chants (musical). Then each story group experiences a ‘play day’ with teamwork in retelling and acting out the story (Community Orientation, Bodily Kinesthetics, and Spatial).

All these Play and Sport strategies take place in the classroom in preparation for the exciting day of Play and Sport pedagogy in the outdoor classroom.

On November 1, 2022, the Lapwai Middle School eighth-grade students and I went on a field trip to tip’aẋlíwam [Split Crevice Head of Canyon] near Tolo Lake west of Grangeville, Idaho. This is the story site of *Hay’óoxchacwal kaa Hinméet* [Cottontail Boy and Thunder] (Watters and Walker 1967), where Cottontail Boy and Thunder fought because Cottontail Boy stole Thunder’s wife. During the figh,t Thunder strikes lightning at Cottontail Boy, which creates a big crevice of split rocks in a deep gorge there.

While at tip’aẋlíwam and the Tolo Lake area for Play and Sport, like ’iceyéeye, we wandered and searched around the 36 acres. We saw a táamsas [wild rose] bush, from which the students learned rosehips (rose berries) contain a lot of vitamin C, and some students and I tasted it (Experiential Learning).

They also learned about the mammoth bones found in Tolo Lake in 1994, and that the lake's original name was named after a Niimíipuu woman, Tulikéec Cexcéemit [placing (bets) on cards]. Later, the name was shortened to Tule and corrupted to Tolo by the White settlers. Lastly, the students learned that their Niimíipuu ancestors camped, gambled, raced horses, and dug qém'es [camas] there, and that this site is also the place where the Niimíipuu camped when the U.S. government declared war on the Niimíipuu in 1877.

In search of knowledge and wandering in this Play and Sport outdoor classroom environment, we learned from the land and burned some calories, too. It was a great day at school!

A playful pedagogy creates an environment where students embody the lessons, and teachings become more effective. Children are inspired to learn and share, and they teach their families at home.

Play and Sport with Language

It is only natural to show movement, as our nimipuutímt is verb-based. Therefore, our words are playful! Some nouns and onomatopoeia, or vocal imitation and sound-effect words, show movement. For example: 1.) many Niimíipuu stories start with saying, 'iceyéeye hitoláyca [Coyote is going upriver], 2.) the noun łéepłep [butterfly], where łéep represents the onomatopoeia, and 3.) the sound-effect for a bird flying up to a branch, kwalalalala; I demonstrate this with my hand fluttering upward.

la

la

la

la

kwa

The sound effect, coupled with the bird's movement and the use of imagination, adds a magical touch to storytelling with TPR and sound effects of the nimipuutímt onomatopoeia word.

Conclusion:

I can name many examples of Play and Sport in language and story teaching, but the main point in teaching is to be creative. When your students are engaged, excited, and laughing, this affirms that they are enjoying the Play and Sports pedagogy.

'iceyéeye [Coyote] in Play and Sport has much to show us.'iceyéeye in his adventurous journeys takes us along to discover reimagined ways of learning and teaching that can be fun and include equitable ways of knowing, such as Indigenous land-based pedagogies and Methodologies of Playful Pedagogy for Teaching and Learning Niimíipuu Language and Stories. Through this way of knowing,

the boundaries of defining Play and Sport are reimagined through the lens of ’iceyéeye [Coyote’s] worldview.

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