

Indigenizing the Curriculum: Putting the “Native” into Native American Content Instruction Mandates

Author(s): Cynthia Benally

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Indigenizing the Curriculum: Putting the “Native” into Native American Content Instruction Mandates

CYNTHIA BENALLY, GUEST EDITOR, SPECIAL ISSUE

IN A SPRING 2019 COURSE, I assigned a project based on Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s (2014) article “Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation.” The assignment asked students to set aside about 20 minutes a day during a two-week period to observe the *land*. My goal was for them to understand that they can learn “*from* the land and *with* the land” (p. 7, emphasis in original). One of my students returned with stories of a magpie (or at least she hoped she had observed the same magpie in the two-week period) and a sketch (fig. 1). The magpie would perch on the ledge of the building between the spikes that were purposefully installed to hinder pigeons and other pests from utilizing that environment. The creature would sit between the metal needles for long periods as if taunting the humans who tried to force the creature out of that space. On one occasion, the magpie skittered close to a woman drinking a latte. While she engaged in conversation, the magpie flipped the lid off the cup with expertise and dove in. When the bird lifted their head, foam covered their head—from beak to neck—but the magpie seemed quite satisfied with the exploit.

I enjoyed listening to my student recall the adventures of the magpie. I thought about what I could learn from this bird many consider a nuisance or a problem. I thought of the clever bird perching on a structure that now occupied their home—this structure that was meant to be hostile and unwelcoming, yet the creature endured despite the barriers set up for displacement. The magpie taught lessons of persistence that resonate with Native peoples’ experiences. Despite the structures and obstacles that are and were created to dispossess Native lands and subjugate Native bodies, Native nations and peoples find ways—what Lomawaima and McCarty (2014b) call zones of sovereignty—to create

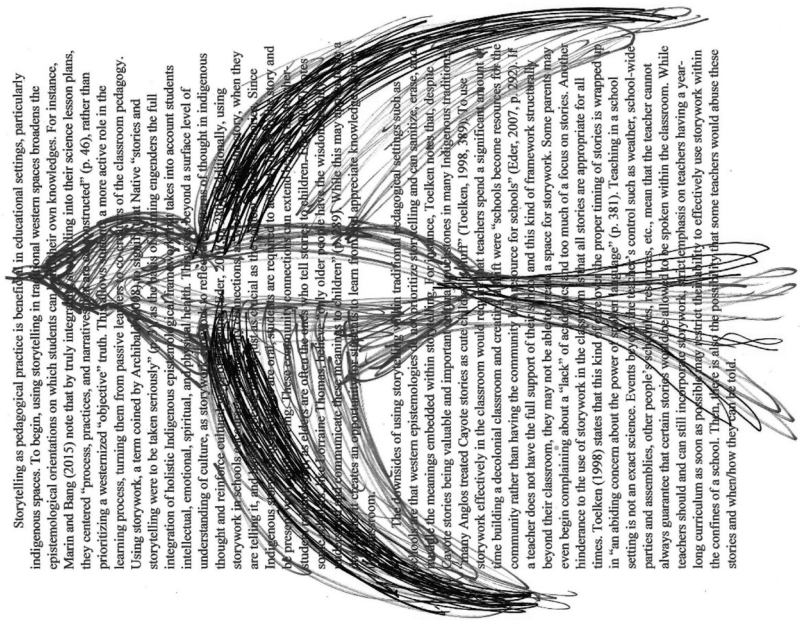


Figure 1. A sketch of a magpie overtaking an essay about utilizing storytelling as a pedagogical tool, by Kylee Ehmann.

places and spaces where they pursue sovereignty, self-determination, and Indigeneity on their own terms.

Native American K-12 content instruction mandates, policies, and laws are ways Natives can and have claimed space in settler society's curricula. The aim of this special issue is to (a) bring attention to laws that require Native content instruction for *all* students, (b) highlight the ways Natives are (re)claiming education through the state mandated initiatives, (c) guide policymakers, educators, parents, and other stakeholders in ratifying and implementing initiatives that require Native content instruction. The state mandates highlighted in this special issue require Native content instruction for all students, including but not solely Native students. These laws are intended for all students to learn about Native nations, sovereignty, and histories. For non-Native students lacking in this knowledge, the laws acknowledge that Native peoples still exist while affirming for Native students that we have and continue to exist despite colonization.

These state laws have the potential to establish zones of sovereignty and to serve as resolutions for acknowledging a collective national memory, one built on a foundation that “apologizes . . . to all Native Peoples

for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States,” and “to acknowledge the wrongs of the United States against Indian tribes in the history of the United States in order to bring healing to this land” (Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2010, sec. 8113.a.4 & 6).¹ Each article in the special issue offers lessons on how existing or future curricular initiatives and relationships can be strengthened using Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

Place is inherently linked to Native experiences and histories. The state laws featured here explicitly mention place-based instruction about the Native nations who originally and have continually inhabited the lands which are now known as Arizona, Oregon, Maine, Wisconsin, and Montana. By naming and acknowledging the nations within each of the states, zones of sovereignty are expanded while settler colonial society’s “safe” constructs of the “vanished Indian” are challenged. For example, Arizona Revised Statute 15-710 requires instruction about the 22 Native nations in Arizona: the Ak-Chin Indian Community, Cocopah Tribe, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Fort Mojave Tribe, Gila River Indian Community, Havasupai Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Hualapai Tribe, Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians, Navajo Nation, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Quechan Tribe, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Community, San Carlos Apache Tribe, San Juan Southern Paiute, Tohono O’odham Nation, Tonto Apache Tribe, White Mountain Apache Tribe, Yavapai-Apache Nation, Yavapai-Prescott Tribe, and the Pueblo of Zuni. The 10 nations mandated for inclusion in Oregon are the Burns Paiute Tribe, Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, Coquille Indian Tribe, and the Klamath Tribes. The Maine law requires instruction about the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, Mi’kmaq, and Abenaki. Wisconsin Act 31 requires students to learn about the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Forest County Potawatomi, Ho-Chunk Nation, Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Sokaogon Chippewa Community, Saint Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin, and Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians. The Montana State Constitution mandates all state citizens to know about the Blackfeet Nation, Crow Tribe of Indians, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Fort Belknap Indian Community, Fort Peck

Tribes, Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Northern Cheyenne Tribe, and Chippewa Cree Tribe.

We are still here.

Relationality is an important way of being and knowing in Native communities and it is manifested in all the featured articles. Arizona's ARS 15-341 and ARS 15-710 were conceived so that future Native and non-Native policymakers could enter into reciprocal and respectful relationships. I argue that Native American content instruction laws and mandates are entry points to zones of sovereignty. Leilani Sabzalian, Angie Morrill, and Se-ah-dom Edmo share how the collective work of community members led to Oregon's SB 13 Tribal History/Shared History law. They write that "[o]rganizing and advocacy for Indigenous education are powerful opportunities that bring people together, and clarify values, goals, and commitments, processes that have value in and of themselves." The authors pay forward the advice and lessons learned from other state initiatives to create their state bill and advocate for its passage. Khal Schneider, Dale Allender, Margarita Berta-Ávila, Rose Borunda, Gregg Castro, Amy Murray, and Jenna Porter are all members of the California Indian History Curriculum Coalition, "a large cast of California Indian community members, history experts, university leaders, and educators" created to revise how the histories of California Indians are taught. The authors elaborate on the purposes for laws that mandate Native content instruction. Christine Rogers Stanton, Jioanna Carjuzaa, and Brad Hall reflect in a case study on the 20 years of Montana's Indian Education for All Act. They feature promising practices such as reciprocal relationships that can develop between state universities and tribal colleges. An example is the Indian Leadership Education and Development program created in collaboration between Little Big Horn College and Montana State University to "recruit, educate, certify and place American Indian educators into administrative positions in schools with high populations of Native American students." More than 125 Native educational leaders participated in this collaborative effort. Rebecca Sockbeson writes that the Wabanaki Studies Law, known as LD 291, "was achieved through collaboration by Maine's government and Wabanaki activists." Tribal educators, including Passamaquoddy and Penobscot historians, contributed to Maine's curriculum development and universities funded its dissemination. As is always the case, these relationships need continual work to develop and strengthen. Heather Ann Moody contributed a *Report from The Field* on Wisconsin Act 31. The Wisconsin law was created in

response to racism against and misconceptions about the rights of Native peoples and nations. Although the law is not implemented ideally, “colleagues across the state from PK–16 to state agencies to Native nations to local communities have come together to create valuable resources.” The examples of Native American content instruction laws featured in this special issue “chip away at the institutions and structures of power that reinforce safety zone boundaries” while creating and cultivating zones of sovereignty (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2014a, p. 9).

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NOTE

1. The 111th Congress (2009–2010) passed H.R. 3326, Department of Defense Appropriation Act, 2010 on December 19, 2009. Buried within the Act was the *Apology to Native Peoples of the United States*. I share the entirety of that section:

SEC. 8113. (a) ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND APOLOGY.—The United States, acting through Congress—

(1) recognizes the special legal and political relationship Indian tribes have with the United States and the solemn covenant with the land we share;

(2) commends and honors Native Peoples for the thousands of years that they have stewarded and protected this land;

(3) recognizes that there have been years of official depredations, ill-conceived policies, and the breaking of covenants by the Federal Government regarding Indian tribes;

(4) apologizes on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native Peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States;

(5) expresses its regret for the ramifications of former wrongs and its commitment to build on the positive relationships of the past and present to move

toward a brighter future where all the people of this land live reconciled as brothers and sisters, and harmoniously steward and protect this land together;

(6) urges the President to acknowledge the wrongs of the United States against Indian tribes in the history of the United States in order to bring healing to this land; and

(7) commends the State governments that have begun reconciliation efforts with recognized Indian tribes located in their boundaries and encourages all State governments similarly to work toward reconciling relationships with Indian tribes within their boundaries.

(b) DISCLAIMER.—Nothing in this section—(1) authorizes or supports any claim against the United States; or (2) serves as a settlement of any claim against the United States.

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