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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on findings from the 'Learning for Understanding through Culturally-Inclusive Imaginative Development' project (LUCID). LUCID has been a five-year (2004-2009) research and implementation endeavour and a partnership between Simon Fraser University (SFU) and three B.C. districts. Via emotionally engaging pedagogies and a culturally inclusive curriculum, the project aimed at improving the educational experience of, in particular, First Nations learners. Using a mixture of Actor Network Theory (Latour 2005) and Hermeneutic Phenomenology (Van Manen 1990), site visits and interview data were examined with reference to the (f)actors influencing project objectives. Although each school district was unique, shared themes included: the importance of creating a community with shared intent; the role of the executive as potential 'change agents'; the problematic nature of emotionally engaging teaching; and the complex influences of cultural and historical trauma. The latter theme is explored in particular, presenting the argument that language deficiency and a consequent lack of autonomy might be at the root of many problems experienced in First Nations communities.

INTRODUCTION

First Nations education

Like the rest of Native North America, Canada's First Nations have not meshed well with the Western public education system and its emphasis on literacy and theoretical knowledge. In both Canada and the USA this mismatch is reflected in lower than average literacy and high school completion rates and lower scores for high-stake academic subjects (National Aboriginal Health Organization 2007; National Indian Education Study 2006). First Nations children in these countries are also at higher risk for health and behavioural problems. A shortfall in schools teaching in Native languages, in curricula inclusive of Native content and in First Nations educators and the general lack of Aboriginal political control over educational institutions account to some degree for these problems (Fettes 2005; Demmert 2001; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996). However, while there is agreement that a reversal of the status quo requires a form of education that caters better for First Nations learners, exactly what form this education might take is still unclear.

The LUCID project

When Dr Mark Fettes won a five-year grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) to use imaginative education in conjunction with a culturally inclusive First Nations curriculum, the 'Learning for Understanding through Culturally-Inclusive Imaginative Development' (LUCID) project was initiated. The project was a combination of two ingredients that have been argued (Demmert 2001) to be lacking in the Canadian public education system: a curriculum firmly grounded in Indigenous culture and tradition, and a pedagogical approach of engaging all students.

Imaginative education (e.g. Egan 2005; Nielsen 2004; Eisner 1998) can be broadly defined as the attempt to engage students emotionally in the learning content via images and connections with human feelings. When we hear a story, for example, it is different from being told the facts contained within the story; a story helps us realise how we *feel* about the content, and thus makes us relate the content to our fears, dreams and aspirations – our uniquely human qualities (Egan 2005; 1997). As such, imaginative education can be said to be part of a growing interest in creative and emotionally engaging education (e.g. Glazer 1999; Goleman 1997, 1994; Orr 1999; Palmer 1999;

Gatto 1997; Miller 1997). In the last 20 years brain research has shown that the engagement of affective domains increases attention, retention and enjoyment in the act of learning and also that it is closely related to images and the imagination (e.g. Damasio 2003; LeDoux 1996). When we imagine, this activates not only the parts of the brain linked to emotions but also the part of the brain where logical processes mainly take place (the cortex). In other words, if we engage students' imagination, we will engage their affective domains while the learning content is being processed, resulting in a more enjoyable and memorable learning path.

There are many theoretical models of teaching imaginatively (e.g. Egan 2005 – see www.ierg.net for examples); Nielsen 2004; Eisner 1998), but what all approaches share is an effort to engage students emotionally in the learning content. Teachers in the LUCID project were not required to use a particular framework of imaginative education, but instead received professional development on various models subscribing to the above broad definition. As indicated, they also received training in culturally inclusive ways of incorporating First Nations history and culture into the curriculum. This training was aided by First Nations educators, as these participants in the project held local knowledge of etiquettes and protocols with regards to teaching First Nations content.

Project design

Driven by a philosophy of community collaboration, LUCID has been a relatively long-term research and implementation project (2004-2009) based on an alliance between Simon Fraser University's (SFU) Faculty of Education and three BC communities: the Stó:lō, Haida and Ts'msyen First Nations communities within, respectively, the Chilliwack, Queen Charlotte Islands and Prince Rupert school districts. The project design was closely aligned with the Community-University Research Alliances Program (CURA), a branch of SSHRC, which, as mentioned, funded the project. CURA encourages universities to involve community organizations in the planning, implementation and evaluation of research projects as a way of supporting community knowledge and practices.

Another collaborative feature of LUCID was that it offered teachers academic assessment of, and accreditation for, their participation in the project. Depending on when they enrolled in the project, teachers could opt to be part of the SFU Masters of Imaginative Education program – which was an opportunity to do graduate work for teachers living in non-metropolitan areas. During the four years of the project, teachers received professional development in imaginative and inclusive teaching strategies equivalent to a full-time Masters program. A generous budget for travel and collaboration within and between school districts also helped create a comprehensive network of participants – university staff and students, teachers, school district leaders, First Nation councils, parents and First Nations and non-First Nations students.

METHOD

Mixed methodologies

Given that LUCID had collected no real base-line data other than the broader literature on First Nations education, I needed a sympathetic means of evaluating its successes, difficulties and of assessing what context each party was bringing to the project. I chose a combination of qualitative research methodologies in which I already had some experience: Actor Network Theory (ANT) and hermeneutic phenomenology. Latour (2005) describes ANT as inviting the researcher to examine the functions of subjects, the beliefs and interests that steer their actions and the rationale behind these actions.

The ANT lens also focuses on socio-technical networks to highlight that no-one acts alone and that not all significant (f)actors are human (Goguen 2000, p.2).

Hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen 1990) also seemed suitable because my wish was not only to draw 'conclusions' about LUCID; I also wanted to *describe* some of its inherent complexity. This would be useful to outsiders to the project who, without having been through the experience themselves, are unlikely to be satisfied with ready-made conceptualisations. Similarly to ANT, hermeneutic phenomenology uses language that attempts to evoke the actors and their networks to readers. Latour (2005) argues that if a description needs an explanation it is not a very good description. Contrary to this view, however, I have made the assumption that description and explanation are not mutually exclusive and that sometimes a combination of both might serve the reader best (Davies 1998; Geertz 1998; Polkinghorne 1995; Zeller 1995; Van Manen 1990).

Data collection

Eight separate site visits to all three BC districts involved in the project were conducted over six weeks, spread out over the latter half of 2006 (follow-up interviews were also conducted in 2007). Recognising the usefulness of triangulation, I chose three categories of data collection: interviewing, observation and documentation (Atkinson et al. 2001; Hart 2000; Woods 1999). I thus collected data through (1) semi-structured interviews with, and focus groups of, education professionals and members of the wider school community; (2) observations of interactions between project leaders, teachers and students; and (3) analysis of school policies and documents.

Interviews were semi-structured so that the dialogue could be steered in the direction of the overall research aims and to allow for unexpected findings and insights (see Appendix A). Most interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed. I also took notes during or after observations of interactions between teachers, principals, project leaders and students about (a) teacher practices involving First Nations content inclusion and (b) the use of emotionally engaging pedagogies, as broadly defined earlier. Documentation consisted of learning outcomes, school policies and teachers' lesson plans and writings. The main purpose of collecting these documents was for corroboration or contrasting with data obtained from interviewing and observing.

Data analysis

Data analysis involved (1) thematic analysis of interview and focus group data, (2) triangulation of data from different sources and (3) perception and member checks. Collecting the data at each site, using the mixed qualitative research methods lens, I conducted an initial analysis of each site. After verifying the findings from all three districts with members from each district, I identified any overarching and significant themes that were supported by the data and any tentative conclusions relating to each site. I developed the themes using the 'constant comparative method' (Atkinson 2001; Neuman 1997; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias 1992; Strauss 1987), which involves continuous interplay between the researcher, the broader literature and the emerging data so that the researcher can recognize themes embedded in the data. I used three stages of coding – open, axial and selective (Strauss 1987) – to recognize and define those themes.

The following two sections contain the findings of my research. The first section will present relatively raw data on the LUCID (f)actors and their networks, with minimal interpretation. The next section will summarize data from the first section that validate a particular theme, and I will present additional and related data with which to discuss and interpret a particular theme that I suspect is of utmost importance to the other themes. In these two sections pseudonyms protect the identity of participants.

THE LUCID (F)ACTORS

Schools and school districts

Four schools in the Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte School District 50 were involved in LUCID. The district covers the eponymous islands off the northern coast of British Columbia. The Haida Nation constitutes about 40% of the islands' 5500 inhabitants, with Haida children making up 61% of school enrollments – a percentage that is likely to increase because of economic difficulties (Fettes 2005, p.8). But despite this high percentage, the school district does not have a long tradition of collaboration with the Haida Nation, and an official educational/accountability contract did not exist until 2003 (Fettes 2005, p.9).

Five schools in the Prince Rupert School District 52 (pop. 14 000) were involved in LUCID. This region on the northern coast has long been a point of convergence for the fishing and forest industries but is now in economic decline. More than half of the nearly 2000 students in the region are First Nation, belonging largely to the Ts'msyen Nation. Others are from the neighboring Nisga'a, Gitksan, Haida and Haisla Nations. In 10 years of operation, the district's office of First Nation Educational Services has gained a positive reputation for its initiatives, including local language focus, catch-up programs for students lagging behind by two grade levels or more and a culturally inclusive curriculum (Fettes 2005, pp.9-10).

Chilliwack School District 33 (pop. 86,000), in the Upper Fraser Valley, is one of the fastest growing areas in British Columbia. About 12% of its 11,500 students are First Nation (Fettes 2005, p.7), the majority of whom are from seven 'bands': Tzeachten, Squiala, Aitchelitz, Yakwekwioose, Skwah, Skway and Cheam. Until a recent political split, these bands were among the 24 members of the Stó:lō Nation (Fettes 2005, p.7). In 1998 the Chilliwack district entered into a formal education agreement with the Stó:lō Nation to ensure the academic success of its learners. Among several current initiatives, a district-wide focus on literacy involving families has improved retention rates and academic achievement, but drop-out rates (especially for boys) are still of concern, as are overrepresentation in modified programs and a persistent gap in grade scores (Fettes 2005, p.7). Two schools in the district were involved in the LUCID project.

The three school districts – Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte, Prince Rupert and Chilliwack – were originally all chosen by the SFU team because they (a) had a high proportion of First Nation students, (b) had already developed education agreements and other collaborative decision-making arrangements with First Nations and (c) had previous experience in working with the Faculty of Education at SFU (Fettes 2005, p.8). All three school districts and schools are unique, but together they create a political and institutional spectrum conducive to investigation. Lacking only a big city setting, LUCID takes a broad snapshot of urban settlement in British Columbia – from the small towns on Haida Gwaii, to the regional centre of Prince Rupert, to the city of Chilliwack, with a population over 80 000. Focusing on grades 4-7 and selecting schools with varying policies and levels of accommodating First Nation children (Haida Gwaii has the lowest, Prince Rupert the highest and Chilliwack is somewhere in the middle), LUCID had the pedagogic and demographic range to provide broad insights into Aboriginal education in Canada, and possibly, elsewhere.

Teachers

There were approximately 20 teachers involved in LUCID, with a turnover of approximately 30% during the time of my research (latter half of 2006). Three teachers

were First Nation. I interviewed 14 teachers, of whom two were First Nation.

The background, personal beliefs and interests of these teachers were diverse, but there was a common desire to better accommodate all students. While reporting imaginative education to be “extremely challenging”, many of the teachers also saw it as a major attraction. One teacher said: “LUCID gives theoretical validation and authority to a creative approach to education – something I have always had a desire for but also felt insecure about since it is not the norm.” Another said:

LUCID has been really beneficial... previously I'd say that my teaching was imaginative, but it wasn't as focused or with the same depth of knowledge that I have developed now... I think I also have become a more artistic and creative person in general, willing to look at boundaries and question them and how to extend them, thinking of possibilities and trying to think outside the box.

In regard to the culturally inclusive aspect of the project, many of the non-First Nation teachers had previously felt that teaching First Nations material was inappropriate. One non-First Nation teacher said:

Before LUCID I felt it wasn't even my place to teach First Nations content, as I am not Aboriginal... Because [project leaders] have been so encouraging toward non-Aboriginal teachers teaching First Nations content, I have felt almost a liberation in my teaching... as if I have suddenly been set free to engage with First Nations culture and content for the first time.

Indeed, practically all of the teachers in the project spoke of feeling empowered by the encouragement and legitimization of LUCID to (a) teach more creatively and (b) use First Nations content. The teachers also appreciated being part of an imaginative and inclusive teaching community that validated “a more systematic approach” in which “cultural inclusion and creativity are not regarded as merely ‘add-ons’ but integral to teaching and learning”. As one teacher summed it up:

Building collaboration and a community of teachers has been the strongest and most important part of LUCID. Being able to see and hear what other teachers are doing has been really invigorating. Now we meet regularly to discuss and help each other with our classroom projects.

Principals

Eleven principals, of whom one is First Nation, were involved in the LUCID project at the time of research. Four principals were interviewed.

In general, the principals were sympathetic to the project's intentions. One principal expressed the majority belief “...that First Nation inclusion relies on the children having a stake in their education, and that it needs to be tied in with their culture”. Also expressing a sentiment shared by most, Robert, a principal who had worked in First Nations communities for many years, said:

For too long education has been Euro-centered, but it has started to change over the last 10 years. Success comes from having an emphasis on language and culture, by bringing elders into the school community, telling imaginative stories with color and excitement. First Nation learners are very tactile-kinesthetic learners – they need a “see-do” approach. In the schools I have been at, we have worked on making the four walls disappear, investigating the curriculum via outdoor activities – such as fishing, exploring the properties of distance, biology, rate and ratio, and so on.

A big problem reported by principals was that some teachers were disconnected from their students, lacking knowledge about and empathy for them. Again, Robert's comments summed up a shared view:

Some teachers really have racial views, and unless they really change in some dramatic way, their teaching will always be coloured by these views. To me, striving to

become a part of the community is key. We may all have some racially motivated factors within us, but if one lives with the community it automatically fosters understanding for the people living in that community. And understanding fosters empathy. I was once invited into a First Nation community and lived there for a longer period of time, which helped create the empathy that I have now.

However, where some educators did demonstrate goodwill, Robert reported, religion and politics emerged as a problem within the First Nations communities themselves:

Even though I have empathy and have always tried the best I could to be inclusive to all parts of the community, it is very hard to reconcile the political tensions without making someone feel that you are taking sides... I have had my hand kissed by parents, and I have had rocks thrown at me, splitting open my head.... We don't all think the same. This was a big realization for me when I learned that.

Only around 5% of all LUCID participants interviewed did not clearly express belief in the objectives of the project. One reason was that they thought a focus on First Nation content might do a disservice to the student population as a whole. "I have a fear that a focus on First Nation education may marginalize Aboriginal students even further... I am scared of ghettonization", said one teacher. Most others, however, felt strongly about the need to help FN learners via a more inclusive curriculum, since, as one principal put it, "...Aboriginal communities have been marginalized for so long that it needs a particular effort in schools to rectify the damage done in the past".

Although the number of interviewed participants expressing lower commitment was relatively insignificant, it is still worth noting that the level of commitment shown by principals significantly affected the general attitude of the school community. Where the principal was highly sympathetic, staff seemed to embrace the project with only minor reservations. In schools where the principal had reservations about the focus on First Nations content, teachers came across as slightly more isolated in their endeavor to carry out project intentions.

Other problems principals reported on were the result of a general lack of resources in schools and the tension between wanting to have more imaginative teaching and districts' push for accountability, which puts pressure on teachers to focus on ends rather than means.

Project leaders

Apart from the LUCID director, Dr Mark Fettes, the project leadership comprised two other SFU staff and four school district leaders. All current project leaders were interviewed.

All project leaders spoke positively of the collaboration between the school districts and SFU. The school district leaders said "LUCID has given academic credibility to First Nations inclusion by having the university community involved". SFU staff said, "Working with the school districts is paramount to creating change in the community."

Because of the central position school district leaders hold, they exerted a strong influence on the wider school community. Where they were regarded highly, working relationships were harmonious. But in a district where some of the teachers were unsatisfied with some aspects of the school district leadership, and in some cases even feared judgment from their leader(s), working relationships seemed strained at times.

Much of the strain seemed to stem from personality clashes and the issue of protocol. Some teachers thought the school district leader(s) adhered to protocol too rigidly, and some district leaders felt some teachers had "a lot to learn about protocol" and needed "correction and explicit guidance at times". Pam, a First Nation school district leader, offered some insight into the difficulty of her position:

It is easy to get teachers interested, but to keep up that dialogue is difficult. It is in

the nature of the topic [imaginative and inclusive education] to be difficult. And to plug something complex into dysfunction is even more difficult. System theory is very important. In [British Columbia] there needs to be something set up to deal with dysfunction... I did not realize all the obstacles. A lot of people don't like you. It is not easy to be 'the other'.

Other problems reported by some school district leaders were lack of time and school resources. One school district leader said:

These are small school districts, in which we have to do everything – time is crucial. Full-time hiring of project leaders would be really great, otherwise other things will pull you away. It is easier to let LUCID objectives go if a child acts up.

Despite the challenges, all project leaders agreed that the partnership between SFU, First Nations communities and BC school districts would in the end help students' learning. The SFU leaders found the school district leaders' expertise as "cultural brokers" to be invaluable, and the school district leaders felt that the SFU team had given teachers the language and framework to plan and deliver more engaging and inclusive learning. One drawback was "that it is a challenge working collaboratively across long distances".

Students

As mentioned, the project involved non-Aboriginal and First Nation children from several bands and First Nations. Furthermore, within the three districts there was a broad spectrum of ability, with one district reportedly having higher functioning students on average than the other two. The range in ability resulted in data showing that the effect of imaginative teaching can vary according to student ability.

For example, higher functioning students were reported as "...initially having difficulty adjusting to imaginative teaching," whereas average functioning students were reported to "...really run with the idea". Lower functioning and normally less engaged students were reported by some teachers to have real difficulties with imaginative modes of learning and by others to excel. Adding to the complexity of this data, lower functioning kids who felt at ease with imaginative teaching were from the district that had on average higher functioning students. Girls were also reported by a few teachers to want 'regular' teaching, whereas boys "...often wanted to continue when the formal lesson stopped".

Assessing the relationship between imaginative education and academic outcomes is complicated by the fact that teachers differed considerably in their interpretation of, and approach to, imaginative teaching. On top of that, it is difficult to know how much of any change to attribute to the cultural inclusion or the imaginative teaching elements of LUCID. The matter of controlling the many other variables of teaching in general also complicates the task of breaking down findings of correlation and causality in this project.

Another complexity is in the nature of imaginative education itself. Many of the LUCID participants recognised that creative and emotionally engaging education engages dimensions that students (and teachers) are not used to. It is also a relatively new phenomenon in educational theory and practice and, as one school district leader put it, generally "...teacher training does not prepare adequately for being imaginative in the classroom".

It is worth recalling the words of the First Nation school district leader cited previously, who said that it is in the nature of imaginative (and inclusive) education to be difficult and that to 'plug' something complex into a challenging setting is even more difficult. Couple this with the fact that traditional First Nation education was much more experiential – one in which "...children learned by actively participating in the life of the

community” (Campbell 2005, p.66) – and this already difficult approach appears at odds with both the educational setting and the learning style of the target group.

As a whole, however, LUCID was reported to have positive effects on students and teachers alike. Teachers commented on the increased written output and participation of students who had been only moderately engaged in their learning pre LUCID. Students were doing a lot of journal writing, for example, because they "are engaged with the content in a different way". Also, the community-oriented approach of some teachers reportedly led students to perceive their learning much more positively and to have more enjoyment in completing learning tasks.

As LUCID was a relatively long-term project, there was a potential for retrieving quantitative data on student outcomes and standard assessment, depending on how meticulously the participating schools have recorded student achievement scores pre and post LUCID. However, even if that had been done in the beginning of the project, it might have been difficult to see too much impact on the standard assessment data, as there is always considerable ‘noise’ within any school, and as it is hard to tie multiple relationships (pedagogies, staff turnover, teacher differences) to quantifiable data.

Parents

From interviews with parents and the accounts of teachers and project leaders, it seems that in general parents appreciated the intent and efforts of LUCID. While imaginative education did at times seem foreign to some parents, a majority felt pride in their children learning about their cultural roots and pleased that this was being done in engaging and creative ways. At a display of children’s work, parents were “...happy and proud about what the children had done”.

However, the focus on First Nations tradition and culture brought up an aspect of the past that some parents were reluctant to engage with and appeared to want to forget. When students were asked to interview their parents about their family history for a class project, one student came back the next day saying that his dad did not want to talk about his past, not even – when prompted by his teacher – about the nice things discussed in class that his dad could talk about.

Yet confronting First Nations communities with aspects of the past may also have a healing effect on families and parents. As mentioned, parents felt that cultural inclusion was “long overdue”, showing appreciation that teachers cared about their children’s background and culture, and not just because it is ‘effective schooling’. One parent, on seeing his daughter’s teacher interacting with students, emailed the teacher saying: “...your love and dedication to [the children’s] needs will help them succeed at life... please do not lose hope in what they can achieve later in life.” For many of the parents, LUCID represented a reconciliation process missing in their own schooling, and so they valued all the more deeply its presence in their children’s education.

Support networks

There were five non-human actors in the LUCID project: (1) the masters course in imaginative education that SFU offered to teachers in the project; (2) the mid-term LUCID conference, showcasing the teachers’ classroom projects and project leaders’ research; (3) formal meetings to aid collaboration, such as the LUCID Advisory Committee; (4) informal meetings where teachers helped each other with class teaching and projects; and (5) the LUCID website, containing newsletters and shared materials and resources.

The Masters course proved to be an invaluable scaffold for the LUCID teachers, giving them an advantage over other teachers in terms of imaginative teaching. According to project leaders, breadth of understanding was “... simply not as good in the

teachers who are not part of the Masters.”

The mid-term LUCID conference ran for two days in Port Edward (near Prince Rupert), bringing together teachers and project leaders to celebrate what they had achieved so far in their classes and in their research, respectively. Many teachers found this a source of inspiration: “Seeing what others have done gave you new ideas for your own class”. Spending time together in a setting where they also slept and had their meals further strengthened community spirit among participants in the project.

The LUCID Advisory Committee was set up in all the school districts but maintained most strongly in one. It regularly brought together school district leaders, representatives from the First Nation Council, principals and teachers to evaluate the short and long-term goals of the project. According to project leaders, it was an effective vehicle for “collaboration and problem-solving.” That the two districts with less established committee meetings reported slightly less harmonious working relationships is noteworthy, although it is unclear which is cause and which is effect.

In the school district with a strong LUCID Advisory Committee, some teachers also held weekly, informal meetings of their own to keep up a dialogue and help each other with classroom projects. In the other two districts greater geographic distances may have been a reason for not getting together informally.

The LUCID website currently (April, 2008) disseminates LUCID information and outcomes to outsiders as well as participants through regular news updates, newsletters, teacher resources and research papers. Despite an initial desire to pool resources online, project leaders indicated that “...it is difficult to get teachers to participate in [a digital space] because of teachers being so busy as they are”.

The ‘culturally layered’ context

Finally, in the terminology of Latour (2005), a major but largely unspoken factor, or ‘actancy’, was the ‘culturally layered’ context itself, containing many tensions within it. The material and educational disadvantages of First Nation communities and the kind of poverty and alienation from the mainstream of Canadian society and schooling have no doubt been factors that ‘make a difference’ to the LUCID project; and alongside this, the non-Indigenous subject positions of others involved in LUCID can also be said to have existed in terms of postcolonial relations of the network, which can only have been critical to the network of relations going on in LUCID (Taylor 2007). One particular aspect of data relating to this tension – how language proficiency may be pivotal in any endeavours to improve First Nation education – will be explored further in the following section.

DISCUSSION

Some overarching themes

The previous section on the LUCID (f)actors showed that teachers, in particular, felt that building a community around imaginative teaching and cultural inclusion had been a major factor in successfully carrying out project objectives. Teachers meeting to discuss and share successes and challenges was essential to building a community of common intent, which in turn motivated and inspired the individual teacher in his or her classroom practices. With the creation of the LUCID community, teachers no longer felt isolated in their wish to be creative in their teaching – or that it is inappropriate to teach First Nations content. Furthermore, they had acquired shared languages for talking about imaginative and inclusive education, as well as opportunities for communicating and networking to that end.

Data in the section on LUCID (f)actors also show that knowledge of students, their community and the protocol needed to interact in accordance with community wishes, are particularly important for the successful implementation of LUCID objectives. Especially important is the modelling of such practices by the executive. If project leaders, including principals, fail to exemplify these practices, it will have an effect on the entire school ethos and the individual teacher's classroom. Connected to the notion of the executive as potential 'change agents' are also the issues of resources and time, which have been suggested could be more adequate. Employing school district leaders full time on the project and having more meetings on a regular basis were mentioned as ways of bringing more alignment into the LUCID network of actors. School district leaders, who in general were seen as important 'cultural brokers', also said that time set aside for the explicit teaching of protocol to teachers was needed, as some teachers felt insecure about it and at times even threatened by it.

The section on LUCID (f)actors furthermore established that working with imaginative education in LUCID is problematic because of the inherent nature of the topic itself. The imagination belongs in large part to the affective, emotional domain, which historically has not been nurtured or encouraged in education. This, combined with LUCID's additional 'ingredient' of cultural inclusion, means that assessing links between imaginative teaching, a culturally inclusive curriculum and student learning outcomes presents something of a challenge. The strength of LUCID may well turn out to be its holistic approach, so on one level the breakdown of how much of any eventual change is attributable to one or other of the elements of LUCID (cultural inclusion or imaginative teaching) may not be of great concern – as long as they both seem to be working.

Exploring a possibly central theme: How the longhouse became a Victorian picket fence overnight

There is one theme that I would like to explore in particular, as it may be important for a deeper understanding of the other themes. From the data on the LUCID (f)actors, as well as from the larger literature, we learn that LUCID operates within a setting that is beset with challenge. Alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, poverty, low school attendance and high dropout rates present difficult challenges for any education system and pedagogy. This, combined with a public school system that, as a whole, stands in stark contrast to the traditionally embodied and experiential learning of First Nations children, puts LUCID in a position of trying to exert an influence on a community, the workings of which to a large extent reside outside the project's sphere of influence.

Indeed, a social commentary came up during this research that was claimed to have considerable influence on project intentions. Vincent, a proud First Nation teacher in his thirties, recalls:

If you look at First Nations communities today, something happened in there. The older generation made a hard shift in the 1880s, 1890s and early 1900s to change to the European way of life. When you see pictures of their houses, with the little white picket fences, you notice how well kept it all is, how they kept their gardens. And they did that for a good 30 years. What happened after that? The fences eventually fell down, and the houses fell into disrepair. Ninety years later and the houses are still falling down and the fences haven't been replaced. What happened to their kids? Why didn't their kids have that drive and that same withitness that the old original population had, the people who grew up speaking their Native tongue? Why is it that their kids seem to fall off the rails? And what made these beautiful, graceful old people so different? I remember visiting the house of an elder when I was younger. There was a whole wall with racks of china – all matching teacups and plates for putting on feasts. The old people had it together. They

had goals. Yes, they were trying to adopt European ways, and they did that with real grace at times. They were highly respected by both Natives and whites. How did the following generation find it so difficult to follow in their parents footsteps?

There is a pause, then Vincent continues:

It wasn't until I started to read Lev Vygotsky and how he believed that language and thought are intimately connected that I started to understand this. I now believe that the dramatic change that occurred from one generation to the next came about because of a sudden language deficiency. The old generation learned to think in their Native language and that was fine – they thought powerfully. Then they tried to teach their kids English, many of them believing that they would do their kids a favor by not teaching them their traditional language.¹ The only problem was that the older generation was not particularly good at English themselves, and so the kids did not learn a very substantial form of English. In effect, the kids were left with no language learned really well. And now it is intergenerational. The initial language is not there anymore, and the insubstantial English is handed down generation to generation. So the question is, do you fix this now by having First Nations elements reintroduced into the curriculum – will that fix that problem? Certainly, it may improve self-esteem, which in turn may have positive influences on academic achievement, but it does not address the fundamental challenge of a language deficiency. We need to focus on early language intervention. In high school it is already too late.

Commenting on the sensitivity and social ramifications of this argument, Vincent concluded:

To say all this is bound in taboo. It requires a certain amount of courage just to discuss it. A lot of people understandably find it difficult to deal with this argument. One thing is to say you have problems communicating. Another thing is to link that to the very act of thinking itself. But, honestly, I think this is the problem. If we help our kids to speak and thus think well, we in turn also will help combat all the problems associated with bad decision-making, such as teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, low school attendance rates, and so on. The LUCID objectives presuppose that basics have been covered, but the cognitive tools and imaginative teaching may only be a band-aid solution to a much deeper social problem. Language development is needed – for pre-school children as well as their parents.

While these comments may seem controversial to some, there is reason to have “a certain amount of courage”, as Vincent put it, to not disregard them without further interrogation. If language deficiency is indeed at the root of many social and academic problems, we as a society may need to direct more attention to this if we are serious about improving the conditions of First Nations communities. Could it really be that language and thinking are as intimately connected as Vygotsky (1985) indeed argued so persuasively in the first half of the twentieth century? And if so, can Vincent's comments then be considered a sound extrapolation? While perhaps displaying a somewhat nostalgic view of the older generation, partly formed, as he admits, against European standards, do his comments not resonate with the literature on language development and impoverishment in general?

Certainly the literature on intensive language development, not only in indigenous communities, is congruent: children who speak and write well have more academic success (James, Chavez, Beuvais, Edwards & Oetting 1995; Demmert 2001). Interestingly, however, studies involving First Nations communities are not conclusive about the academic benefits of learning Native languages in conjunction with English –

¹ Many First Nation children were also sent to residential school against the family's will, where they were prohibited to speak their mother tongue.

most studies finding some academic benefit (e.g., Smith, Leake & Kamekona 1998; Lipka & McCarty 1994); a few very little or none at all (e.g., James et al. 1995; Willetto 1999). One possible explanation for the partial success of supplementary Native language tuition can be found in the study conducted by Leap (1991) among Northern Ute Indians. This showed that separated literacy programs, in either the Native language or in English, resulted in increased literacy levels – and sometimes in both languages (Demmert 2001, p.20). Moreover, studies on second-generation immigrant children losing their mother tongue without acquiring a strong grasp of a second language demonstrate a significant decline in academic ability (Gindis 2007; Cummins 2000). From at least these two perspectives, it seems, the most important thing may not be *what* languages are learned as long as at least *one* language is learned really well.

Recent research on First Nation languages in Canada (Norris 2008) shows that the use of Native languages as a first language is in sharp decline. Only one in four Aboriginal people (239,620) speaks an Aboriginal language, and 20 per cent (47,155) of those speak it as a second language. Learning an Aboriginal language as a second language is increasing with the growth in school initiatives that promote Native languages. But because learning a Native tongue as a second language is no substitute for acquiring it as a first language (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996, in Norris 2008, p.19), it may do little to provide language as a possible primary means of developing thinking. Certainly, learning Native languages has been proven to contribute to increased self-esteem, community well-being and cultural continuity (Demmert 2001) – which in themselves no doubt have positive effects on academic achievement. And certainly, bilingualism, in itself, has been proven to have positive effects on children's linguistic and educational development (Baker 2000; Cummins 2000). But Vincent's argument may help us to understand something very important in planning an approach to First Nation language acquisition in general: that unless students become fully proficient and fluent in their Native tongue – which is becoming more and more difficult as those who speak it as a first language die out – they will still confront the need to become fully proficient in a language as a basis for cognitive development.

Having researched Rudolf Steiner education in earlier work (Nielsen 2004), I was also reminded by Vincent's comments about the very different approach to language development and thinking in Waldorf (Steiner) schools. I therefore asked one of the most respected experts on Steiner education that I know of, Dr Alduino Mazzone, what his thoughts were in regard to the possible links between language development and thinking in general. His response was:

It seems to me that the possible intergenerational problem of language deficiency in First Nation communities is closely tied to an inadequate educational process that does not satisfy the basic needs of children... these children at one time were engaged in their normal family life, with physical activity and crafts and an oral tradition of stories and dance. Thereby their thinking developed naturally and progressively. As the North American (i.e. Western) educational system generally became more oriented towards developing the intellect, the more holistic development of children in so-called less developed cultures decreased to the point where the social and cultural problems identified express themselves.

If we take a Steiner-based child and a curriculum development perspective on how children develop the capacity to think, we naturally start in the preschool and kindergarten years with exercising the Will by developing fine motor coordination through physical movement (basic Eurythmy and games), including finger games, knitting, weaving and other crafts, then in the Primary school having a language-rich and artistic environment in which the children draw and paint and listen to a wide range of stories, practise tongue twisters, recite poems, chant tables etc. And after many years of

practical and imaginative thinking (a kind of feeling/thinking), eventually in the late primary years and in the High school the curriculum turns to more abstract or conceptual thought. Thus, the capacity for thinking also undergoes a process; one that traverses willing and feeling and eventually reaches abstract thinking.

It is important to be clear that language and thought are inextricably bound to each other. Remember that the child first stands then learns to speak and then to think. It is not accurate to say that thoughts exist independently of language. Yes! The realm of meaning is independent of language; indeed each culture can achieve the same meaning but have a different language. Thoughts do exist independently but without language one would never be able to express them.

These words – backed by evidence of the quality of thinking among Steiner school graduates (Oppenheimer 1999; IFO 1995; Ogletree 1996; Smilansky 1990; Gold & Mann 1984) – lend a new angle to the discussion. The language problem may stem not only from First Nation communities having lost their original language in translation, so to speak, but also from having lost (or some would say, had taken away) their original mode of ‘schooling’. Going on the above premise that thinking develops from language, and language from physical activity, there is clearly a link between thinking and physical activity (If A is connected to B, and B is connected to C, then A cannot be disconnected from C!). But this is exactly where things have changed so drastically for First Nations – from having a very experiential and physically embodied learning to being in a modern education system that mostly takes place within four classroom walls and which is saturated with theoretical learning².

The reader may remember the principal Robert’s comments about wanting the four walls to disappear in First Nations education and First Nation learners being “...very tactile-kinesthetic learners – they need a ‘see-do’ approach”. Many of the LUCID teachers were also emphasizing experiential and outdoor activities in their classroom projects. As we have seen, the anecdotal evidence from these educators of the effects this has on not only First Nations learners but all their students is significant. We must also remember, of course, that the potential problems of abstract and non-experiential learning are not peculiar to First Nation learners. From John Dewey (1916) to modern-day voices like John Gatto (1997), direct and experiential modes of learning have been highlighted as often deeper, wider and more meaningful for *all* learners. The important point in this context, however, is that experiential learning might be even more crucial for First Nation learners since, until recently, they were immersed in such learning *primarily* and thus experienced a sudden and abrupt transition to almost the opposite. This is nothing new in itself. What may be less understood, however, is that their language development, and thus their cognition, might well have undergone the most compromise in all of this.

What may also need further interrogation is the fact that the point of balance between theory and activity may not be *a universal convergence point for all learners*. Because of their history and traditional modes of education, First Nation learners might need a more pronounced interface between ‘doing’ and ‘experience’ than their non-First Nation peers. The tradition of passing on knowledge orally from one generation to another required of the learner the skill of reconstructing what had been said by an elder. First Nation learners learned *to live* by hunting, fishing, making crafts, dancing and telling stories. Can Westerners really understand the type of experience and learning modes of discovery that have been the core education of First Nations people? Maybe we may only catch a glimpse of this in poetic statements:

² This is notwithstanding that traditional First Nation child rearing included frequent exposure to complex uses of language in oral narrative.

Travelling in these giant cedar canoes, the Haida would regularly paddle their home into, and out of, existence. With each collective paddle stroke they would have seen their island sinking steadily into the sea while distant snow-covered peaks scrolled up before them like a new planet. Few people alive today have any notion of how it might feel to pull worlds up from beyond the horizon by faith and muscle alone. (Vailant 2005, p.52)

Also highlighting the profound importance of reconstructing experience, as well as linking this to language skills, Donald Oliver (1989, p.175) writes:

"...there is no culture in books or libraries ...unless it is reconstructed carefully and painstakingly in the living brains of each new generation. All that is preserved in libraries is the mere opportunity to perform this reconstruction. But if the language skills and the habits of engaging in reconstruction are not similarly preserved, then there will be no culture, no matter how large and complete the libraries may become. We do not preserve ideas by building libraries and recording voices. The only way to preserve culture is to train people to rebuild it, to 'regrow' it, as the word 'culture' itself suggests, in the only place it can grow – within themselves."

At first glance, two seemingly different elements have been discussed in this section: the importance of language development and the importance of physical experiences in First Nations education. The concept presented here, however, is that the two may exist on the same continuum. Of course, this may be true in general, as the human being is not a dichotomy: our head is connected to our hands. However, there may be no other instances where this holds more true than for First Nations learners, given their recent tradition of embodied 'schooling' and given the opportunity lost to many of them, due to historical events, of learning a language really well.

I took the poetic license of giving this section the subtitle 'How the longhouse became a Victorian picket fence overnight'. Longhouses were the traditional housing of the Pacific Northwest First Nations. These houses were as massive and as long as the cedar trees from which they were built. In contrast, the Victorian picket fences Vincent referred to are a much more fragile construction belonging to First Nation 'life' after European settlement (picket fences also don't work well on sandy islands or rocky coasts – institutionalized structures often match the landscape unless they are transplanted). The subtitle may be poetic, but there is little poetry in what the analogy stands for: it is a story of how the traditional languages and modes of living and learning of First Nations were abruptly substituted by incompatible and, some would say, inadequate European modes of living and learning.

If there appears to be an implicit suggestion that life should revert to how it was for First Nations before European settlement – in the belief that this is somehow possible – there is not. What the above research findings and discussion suggest is simply this: if we as a society want to support efforts, such as LUCID, to advance First Nations communities, we may need to divert our attention and resources to *all* the areas that may help First Nation communities. LUCID has been an example of how education can be much more deliberately grounded in First Nation culture and history and how such teaching can be made more emotionally engaging for all learners. But there is also the need, it seems, for a super-human effort to turn around the crippling effect on many First Nation learners of not having a strong command of a language. Early language intervention and working with parents is needed on a much more committed scale. A case in point is Vincent's proposal for an early language intervention program at his school being turned down because of lack of funding. Committing more resources to language development through legislative channels, combined with more engaging and embodied learning modes in schools, could turn out to be the foundation for everything else. Or put in another way, such efforts could turn out to have positive effects on many

social problems simply because the latter may be direct results of a lack of the former.

CONCLUSION

This study presents research on the efforts and outcomes of LUCID. It confirms that creating a community of shared intent adds value, that the executive can be an agent for change and that emotionally engaging teaching can be problematic as well as potentially transformational. Exploring complex cultural tensions, the study has also indicated that compromised language acquisition may be central to many other problems associated with First Nations education—in turn raising the question of whether this might apply to other Indigenous, post-colonial settings, such as the Australian Aboriginal context, where similar problems exist. If having no opportunity to master either a mother tongue or English—being ‘lost in translation’—is indeed at the root of non-autonomous living and learning, rigorous efforts in early language intervention seem overdue in many places in the world.

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Notes

Some sections in this paper, with more discussions on some of the themes, can also be accessed in:

Nielsen, T. W. (2009) Imaginative and culturally inclusive First Nations education: some LUCID insights. *The imagination in education: extending the boundaries in theory and practice*. Ed. Sean Blenkinsop. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

APPENDIX A

Standard questions for interviews and focus groups:

1	In what ways are you, or have been, involved in the LUCID project?
2	What made you become part of LUCID? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mainly the FN inclusion part? - Mainly the IE part? - Combination of both?
3	Has the involvement in LUCID changed or improved your own imaginative side of your personality (feelings/ creativity/ spirituality)? If so, how?
4	Has the involvement in LUCID changed or improved your feelings or attitudes with regard to First Nation inclusion? If so, how?
5	Has the involvement in LUCID changed or improved your current practices with respects to both imaginative education and First Nation inclusion? If so, how?
6	Who or what are the main elements or links supporting the LUCID project?
7	Who or what determines the processes of operation/ teaching at your school?
8	Have other teachers become interested or wanting to get involved? Why/ why not?
9	In your view, what are the most important roles played by teachers who work with First Nations students?
10	Can you identify what helps and what hinders the effectiveness of the LUCID project?
11	How successful is the LUCID project in supporting First Nations students via imaginative education?
12	What overall suggestions do you have for improving the way teachers support the learning of First Nations students?
13	What suggestions do you have for improving the way teachers can use imaginative and more engaging education to foster FN inclusion?
14	Where do you envision yourself after the LUCID project is over?
15	At the end of the LUCID project, how will you ensure a continuous positive trajectory with regards to teaching imaginatively and working with First Nation inclusion?
16	At the end of the LUCID project, and if so desired, how will you ensure continuous reflection and reciprocal learning in your professional practices with regard to FN inclusion and imaginative education?
17	Are there any other comments you would like to make about the LUCID project or your involvement?