

From Ghosts to Gifts: Weaving Land, Memory, and Care into Curriculum

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Abstract

This paper explores curriculum as a living, relational practice grounded in Métis knowledge, personal narrative, and poetic inquiry. Framed by the metaphor of ghosts and gifts, it reimagines curriculum as ceremony—a sacred process of remembering what was erased, honouring the spirit of the child, and centring kinship, care, and land. By weaving together Indigenous story, blood memory, maternal pedagogy, and speculative imagination, the paper challenges colonial logics of standardization and deficit. It affirms curriculum's transformative potential when rooted in love, imagination, and sacred relationality, offering pathways for healing, resurgence, and dreaming otherwise in educational practice.

Key words: Indigenous curriculum, Métis education, kinship pedagogy, land-based learning, ceremony, wâhkôhtowin

Introduction

What do I know to be true that I have not been told?

As a Métis educator, I have learned that the most profound truths live in the silences of official curricula—in the stories omitted, the knowledges undervalued, and the relationships forgotten. These are not accidental absences but deliberate erasures rooted in colonial power structures.

In this paper, I draw on Indigenous methodologies, poetic inquiry, and personal narrative to explore curriculum not as a static list of content to be mastered but as a living ceremony—one that carries both the ghosts of colonial history and the gifts of cultural resilience. Grounded in my lived Métis experience and guided by a dialogue between scholars such as William E. Doll and William Broussard (2002), Andrew Michael Tarc (2011), and Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011), I examine curriculum through a lens of relational accountability that seeks to honour story, land, and memory as living sources of knowledge. While Tarc and Doll and Broussard write from Western curriculum traditions, I read their work through my own worldview, shaped by Métis understandings of interconnection and reciprocity. I also draw on Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) and Anishinaabe scholar Margaret Kovach (2009), whose teachings affirm that theory emerges from relationship.

Framing curriculum as a haunted space, I ask what means to teach in a classroom filled with spirits—of ancestors, of erased histories, of silenced truths. Throughout this paper, I braid

together personal reflection, scholarly literature, and poetic expression to confront what I call curriculum ghosts. Acknowledging these hauntings is not an act of mourning alone but of curricular resistance and reclamation. By weaving memory, ceremony, and Indigenous knowledge systems into our understanding of curriculum, we begin to transform educational spaces into places of healing, truth-telling, and resurgence.

Ghosts in the Curriculum: Hauntings and Inheritance

I walk through classrooms conscious of curriculum ghosts—those lingering traces of colonial education that still shape our pedagogies. Doll and Broussard (2002) describe these ghosts as the tacit influences of past assumptions and silenced stories that continue to govern how and what we teach. These ghosts persist between the margins of what was taught and what was silenced, curling like smoke from fires that still burn in the memory of residential schools. Tarc (2011) names this our *difficult inheritance*—an educational legacy saturated with trauma and denial. What we inherit is not only official knowledge but also the omissions and injustices that formal curricula have long suppressed.

Confronting these ghosts means remembering what has been erased. Métis and other Indigenous histories have often been relegated to the margins or framed in the past tense rather than recognized as living, evolving, and present. The metaphor of curriculum as smoke is intentional—it signals how the legacy of colonial violence continues to rise into our present experiences of education. We witness this in lesson plans that gloss over Canada’s colonial past, in Eurocentric curricula that position Indigenous knowledge as a cultural footnote rather than a foundational worldview.

As Tarc (2011) reminds us, educators are “asked to remember what was never told” (p. 18). Hannah Edber (2022) extends this by exploring *curricular hauntings*—the ways unresolved historical injustices and silenced voices continue to dwell in educational landscapes, demanding reckoning and relationship. These ghosts, as unsettling as they are, carry potential gifts: they invite us to confront what has been hidden and to open space for healing, truth-telling, and transformation.

Rather than fearing these ghosts, I seek to invite them into dialogue. By centring the languages, experiences, and epistemologies that once were erased, we begin to repurpose curriculum as a living story. The past is not dead or buried; it is carried in every classroom, in every decision about what is taught and what is left unsaid. In engaging these hauntings, we perform an act of curricular resistance—we write back to colonial silence and, in doing so, transform a difficult inheritance into a source of truth, resurgence, and relational renewal.

The following poem arose as a response to these curricular hauntings. It does not explain the theory; it enacts it. As a Métis educator, I offer it as ceremony, as theory, and as a remembering beyond what any textbook can possibly hold.

Remembering What Was Erased

Curriculum ghosts, curriculum gifts,
I walk with both, Métis feet on layered land,
Where stories are not written but remembered,
Where learning is not given but gathered.

William whispers through the past,
Ghosts linger in lesson plans, between the margins
Of what was taught and what was silenced.

Their curriculum curls like smoke from a fire
Still burning in residential classrooms.

Michael speaks of inheritance, not the kind
Found in wills or wealth, but in weight —
A burden sewn into the seams of knowing.
We are asked to carry what once erased us,
Asked to remember what was never told.

Difficult knowledge, Hannah says, can be a gift,
But not without grief,
Curriculum is ceremony interrupted,
Spirit language overwritten by colonial code.

And yet, we write back.

I see my grandfather's weathered hands
Turning soil, turning story.
His teachings did not scream,
They hummed low, below systems.

The ghosts do not haunt me,
They remind me —
Of all the children who learned beneath trees,
Not chalkboards.

Of the curriculum in a deer's path,
The syllabics in bird call,
The lesson in waiting for spring.

I am not just a reader of texts,
I am a translator of memory.
To teach is to conjure,
To respond is to return —
To spirit, to self, to silence.

This is our inheritance:
Curriculum not as control,
But as ceremony.
Not as mastery,
But as medicine.

We do not simply read and write,
We remember.

Knowledge Beyond the Text: Embodiment and Blood Memory

Colonial curricula have long dictated what counts as knowledge by privileging text-based, disembodied, Eurocentric content while dismissing other ways of knowing. True knowledge is carried in our bodies, in our relationships, and in the land itself.

Indigenous scholars such as Cora Weber-Pillwax (Métis), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Anishinaabe), and Maria Campbell (Métis) speak to the ways ancestral knowledge lives within us, not metaphorically but spiritually and relationally. Weber-Pillwax (2021) teaches that spirit is present in all aspects of learning, and that knowledge flows through lineage, relationship, land, and lived experience. This understanding affirms that Indigenous knowing is carried in the body, the blood, and the spirit, connecting us across generations. This understanding aligns with Campbell's (1973) description of knowledge as something carried deeply within the body—beyond words and formal instruction.

I feel this deeply; my own blood memory connects me to my grandmothers and grandfathers, to the stories and songs of my ancestors—even those not formally taught to me. It is always with me, like an internal compass guiding me home.

This embodied way of knowing challenges Western separations of mind and body, theory and practice. Cindy Cruz (2001) argues that the brown body itself is a site of knowledge, affirming that lived, embodied experience carries epistemic authority often ignored by dominant academia. In this way, marginalized communities carry wisdom in lived, bodily experience that formal schooling has too often dismissed. My experiences, and those of my ancestors, are valid forms of curriculum. They form a curriculum remembered rather than written.

I recall my grandfather's teachings that did not scream—they hummed low, below systems. Quiet lessons learned by watching him work the soil and live respectfully upon the land. Though absent from any school textbook, those teachings revealed sustainability, patience, and respect: knowledge as essential as any academic subject.

Meanwhile, David Howes (2022) and Ilana Gershon (2021) remind us that meaning enters through all senses; learning is an embodied, multi-sensory process. Maxine Greene (1988) likewise teaches that the arts awaken our imagination and open pathways toward freedom in learning.

All these perspectives converge on a truth often forgotten in mainstream curricula: *knowledge is alive*. It pulses in our blood, travels with the rhythm of a drum or the stroke of a paintbrush, and whispers in our dreams. The most important things I know—love, kinship, respect for the Earth—were not taught to me through a textbook; they were learned through living.

Curriculum of Kinship and Care

If knowledge lives in relationships, then curriculum must also be relational, a truth I hold close through lived experience and the wisdom of Indigenous maternal pedagogies. From this perspective, curriculum is not merely a vehicle for content; it is a way of holding one another in the process of learning.

Yakonkwehón:we (Mohawk) scholar Joanna Brant (2023) writes about Indigenous maternal pedagogies that confront colonial violence by re-centring the role of mothers, aunties, and grandmothers as protectors, language keepers, and carriers of law. She shows that what is often framed as “care” in Western discourse is, in Indigenous contexts, a deeply political and relational act—one that resists colonial fragmentation by nurturing children, communities, and land-based continuities. Care and relational accountability, in this sense, are not expressions of sentiment but expressions of sovereignty.

Similarly, Muslim scholar Inaam Saleh (2020, 2021) calls for a curriculum of *Rahma*—mercy and compassion grounded in intergenerational responsibility and divine relationality. Her work echoes Brant's insistence that care is not peripheral to pedagogy; it is pedagogy's ethical centre.

Together, Brant and Saleh illuminate a wider truth held across Indigenous and global traditions: that teaching grounded in kinship becomes a sacred act of tending. When education is

rooted in the obligations we have to one another—as relatives, as ancestors, as future ones—curriculum shifts from transmission to care, from content to relationship, from performance to responsibility.

A kinship-based curriculum also requires the creation of ethical space, a concept introduced by Cree scholar Willie Ermine (2007). Ethical space invites dialogue between worldviews, creating room for humility, listening, and mutual respect. Within such spaces, students can lay down the armor shaped by fear, trauma, or exclusion and step into genuine relationship. Cree–Métis scholar Dwayne Donald (2021) extends this further by introducing Wâhkôhtowin—the Cree law of sacred kinship—as an orientation for curriculum and pedagogy. Wâhkôhtowin reminds us that learning is never an individual act; it is a practice of honouring our responsibilities to land, ancestors, more-than-human relatives, and to each other. Donald calls this a *wâhkôhtowin imagination*, a way of seeing curriculum as part of a much older story of relational obligation.

As I continue to remember and reclaim my Métis voice, the writings of Brant (2023) and Saleh (2020, 2021) come together like threads in a sash—each offering a strand of care, challenge, and transformation. These voices echo what I know in my own being. Curriculum is not merely content; it is kinship. Whether expressed through stories, ceremony, or quiet acts of attention, my understanding continues to grow. My silence, once imposed, now gives way to something sacred—a voice rooted in the land, held by my grandmothers, and carried forward with love.

Reflecting upon these teachings, the following poem sets out a curriculum of care as an alternative to the colonial system—one that honours kinship, students and nature.

Curriculum of Care

Colonial echoes
crack the classroom walls,
silence once sat heavy,
where stories were hushed,
and truths untold.
Now, in this space,
we plant seeds of stories,
nurtured by breath and memory.
Indigenous maternal knowing
cradles the circle,
a living web of relationality,
rooted deep in land, language, and love.
Held in the hands of aunties, mothers, grandmothers,
who teach without textbooks,
whose lessons flow like rivers,
carrying resilience and care.
A pedagogy of protection,
a curriculum of care,
woven with the threads of kinship's embrace,
holding safe the fragile and fierce alike.
Students arrive,
carrying fragments of histories,
wearing armor shaped by fear and hope.
We ask them to lay it down,
step into an ethical space,

where discomfort blooms into learning,
and truth grows between us.
Dialogic learning beats like a drum,
calling memory, motion, and courage.
Self-location is a compass,
guiding toward resurgence,
a reclaiming of voice and story.
The land whispers softly:
Teach with breath, not fear.
with rivers, not barriers.
Teach with heart, not harm.
Curriculum is a bundle,
wrapped in kinship,
held in hope,
carried with love and responsibility.

Not for display or token,
but for action,
for healing,
for the sacred return of voice,
the reweaving of futures,
and the song of resilience rising strong.

In learning from my daughter, I began to understand that the spirit of the child is also the spirit of the Earth. The same breath that animates her laughter stirs the leaves, shapes the rivers, and carries the songs of our ancestors. Children, like all of Creation, are teachers of balance and humility. When we listen deeply to them, we hear echoes of the land reminding us who we are and where we belong. The child, in her wonder, becomes the first doorway back to kinship—back to the understanding that humans are not masters of the world but its youngest relatives, still learning how to live in a good way.

Honouring the Spirit of the Child: From Deficits to Gifts

One of the most personal lessons I have learned is to see the spirit of the child rather than a checklist of deficits. Dominant educational paradigms, steeped in colonial and ableist logics, often label children by what they lack in relation to a narrow norm. I confess that at times, I viewed my own child through such a lens. I initially saw only what the reports identified—that she was quiet, distracted, unable to focus—and I worried she had fallen behind in a race she never agreed to run.

My child became my teacher. She moved through the world differently, pausing to talk to birds, crying at loud sounds, sensing unspoken emotions. She did not speak in the ways others expected, yet she knew things many had forgotten. Through her, I began to remember my own teachings; that every child carries sacred gifts and that our role as educators is not to fix them, but to walk beside them in reverence. This shift from seeing a problem to recognizing a constellation changed my pedagogy. It changed my life.

Scholars such as Nirmala Erevelles, Shirley Grace, and Inderjeet Parekh (2019) describe disability as a kind of *meta-curriculum*—one that exposes how education systems define and enforce normality. Children who diverge from those expectations reveal the deeper injustices of the curriculum itself. Erin Manning and Vivienne Bozalek (2024) describe the refusal of neurotypicality not as rejection but as invitation—an invitation to learn otherwise. My child's

refusal to fit into a narrow mold became an act of resistance, a call for me to listen differently. Her learning was not a deviation from the path; it was the path itself.

To honour the spirit of the child is to embrace a strength-based approach. We must ask not *What is wrong with this child?* but *What gifts is this child carrying into our circle?* Every child is a sacred being, and education should help children remember their purpose, not conform to systems that have long tried to erase it.

What will it take to change the system—to refocus and to realize what truly matters? What is knowledge, and how can we honour the spirit of each child? The following poem reflects my own awakening and invites others to re-imagine new possibilities.

From Deficits to Gifts: My Daughter Taught Me to Remember

In the beginning, all I could see were the deficits.
That's what I had been taught to see.
The reports told me she was behind, difficult, unable to focus.
And I, trying to be the "good mother," believed them.
I measured her against their standards.
I feared for her future —
as if she had already fallen behind
in a race she didn't ask to run.

I didn't realize then
that I was looking with colonial eyes.
That I had forgotten my own teachings.
That I was participating in her othering,
and in doing so,
silencing something sacred.

But she would not be silenced.
She moved through the world differently —
stopping to talk to birds,
crying at loud sounds,
laughing during quiet moments.
She knew when someone's energy was off.
She could feel what others had forgotten.
She didn't speak the way they expected,
but she knew.

She remembered.
And slowly, because of her,
so did I.

She rewarded me —
not with compliance or "progress"
but with the gift of seeing again.
Of knowing that value is not in what can be measured,
but in what can be felt,
held,
loved.

That education does not come from mastering a curriculum,
but from being in relation —
with land, story, body, and spirit.

She reminded me that in our Indigenous way,
children are not vessels to be filled,
but spirits to be guided.
That what they carry
is not a problem to solve,
but a gift to honour.

She taught me to slow down,
to feel the world differently,
to attune.

I once saw deficits.
Now I see constellations —
of knowing,
feeling,
being.

She gave me back my language,
my stories,
my ability to trust the unseen.

In Erin Manning's words,
this is the refusal of neurotypicality —
not as rejection,
but as return.

My daughter refused to fit into the frame,
and in doing so,
she re-opened the doorway
to our Indigenous truths.
She reminded me
that my role was never to fix her,
but to walk beside her —
in love and reverence.

Humans as the Youngest Sibling: Learning from Land and Creation

Indigenous cosmologies often describe humans as the youngest siblings of Creation—the last beings to be placed on Earth and therefore the ones with the most to learn. This understanding carries profound humility. The animals, plants, waters, and winds are our elder relatives and teachers. The land is our first teacher. It teaches through story, through silence, through cycles of life and death. It teaches us humility. When we lose that connection, we begin to believe we are above Creation—and that is when harm begins.

Rosi Braidotti's (2017) concept of posthumanism sees it as a way to decentre the human and recognize the agency of the more-than-human world. While her theory resonates with Indigenous understandings of kinship with all beings, it lacks the sacredness that is so important

to Indigenous thought. Technology may be part of our world, but it is bereft of spirit; it cannot hold a loon's song or the scent of sweetgrass, and it does not know how to pray or mourn. Science and technology, unguided by ancestral values, can lead us further from what it means to be human in a good way. In the name of progress, we risk disconnection—from the Earth, from one another, and from the responsibilities we carry as living beings. Science alone cannot save us, especially when driven by profit and control rather than love and balance.

The curriculum has a role to play in healing this disconnection. Donald (2021) speaks of the need for a new story that reconnects us with *wâhkôhtowin*—the Cree concept of sacred kinship. In this new story, humans remember that all parts of creation are relatives, not resources. One way to nurture this remembering is through land-based learning, where students absorb knowledge directly from their surroundings and through all their senses. Sitting beneath the open sky, walking by the river, listening to the forest—these experiences allow the land to become the lesson.

Donald's practice of *walking pedagogy* exemplifies how being on the land can awaken a "*wâhkôhtowin* imagination" (2021), helping learners to see themselves as part of an interconnected web of life. Such approaches counter the *epistemicide* of colonial curriculum, which seeks to kill off other ways of knowing (Paraskeva, 2025). By contrast, they affirm that the Earth itself carries wisdom.

We must return to the land, to ceremony, to human contact—to the truths whispered by the winds and carried by our animal relatives. True knowledge does not emerge from domination but from listening. We do not need to keep looking forward in the name of progress; we must look back and remember what was left behind.

The teaching of humans as the youngest sibling offers a moral and spiritual framework for curriculum. It reminds us that education should cultivate gratitude and stewardship. Instead of positioning students as would-be masters of the Earth, we can guide them to become respectful relatives as part of it. When curriculum honours the more-than-human world as teacher, students develop reverence and responsibility toward all life. They learn that the Earth is not an object or backdrop for human activity but a living presence—to learn from, to honour, and to protect.

Dreaming Otherwise: Story, Imagination, and Decolonial Futurities

To truly transform curriculum, we must be willing to *imagine and dream otherwise*. This means not only confronting the past and honouring the present but also daring to envision more just and loving futures. In this work, story and imagination become sacred tools. Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) writes of *nepantla*—the liminal space of transformation where identities, worlds, and realities can be rewritten. Education should invite us into such spaces of possibility rather than confining us to linear, colonial narratives of progress.

Julietta Singh (2018) calls for a refusal of the conquest-driven curriculum, instead embracing what she terms *errands for the wild*—acts of wandering, wondering, and relational learning beyond colonial constraints. Similarly, Sarah Truman (2019), drawing on Donna Haraway, invites *speculative fabulation* as a pedagogical practice, where storytelling and even science fiction become forms of future-telling that loosen the grip of imposed knowledge.

Anthologies such as *Octavia's Brood* (Imarisha & Brown, 2015) embody this spirit of speculative imagination, merging story and social justice as vehicles for reclamation, survival, and resurgence. These creative practices echo Indigenous storytelling traditions, where knowledge lives between worlds, and where imagining otherwise has always been a form of resistance, love, and continuity.

Nicholas Ng-A-Fook (2025) warns that if we do not shape new stories of the future, colonial logics will persist—now encoded in high-tech forms such as artificial intelligence. He

describes AI as an *algorithm of rule*: an extension of settler colonial power that risks entrenching bias within both curriculum and society. In response, Ng-A-Fook calls for unsettling these technologies by infusing *Indigenous futurities* rooted in relationship, care, and ceremony into our educational visions.

In my capstone research, *Sacred cosmic navels: Illuminating indigenous wisdom* (Chartrand, 2024), I explored how Indigenous wisdom and spirituality could re-root curriculum in the sacred, offering pathways toward healing and reimagining our collective future. This aligns with Ng-A-Fook's (2025) plea: we must dream of futures that centre Indigenous knowledge, relational accountability, and care.

Every just future we seek to build must first be dreamed. When we engage students in storytelling, art, and imaginative world-making, we invite them to become co-creators of a future where the ghosts of colonialism can finally rest—and the wisdom of our ancestors lights the way forward.

Conclusion: Remembering Truths Not Told

In weaving together these reflections on ghosts, knowledge, care, childhood, land, and imagination, I observe a unifying thread: the need to remember truths that colonial education has not told us. I understand curriculum as ceremony—a sacred process of reconnection with ourselves, one another, and the land. Colonial schooling obscured this truth, but it can be remembered and reclaimed.

True knowledge is relational. It is carried in stories, in children's laughter, in the teachings of the rivers and wind. Before colonization, education was about sustaining life and spirit in balance with Creation—a way of knowing that still lives within Indigenous communities despite centuries of erasure. To remember therefore an act of resurgence and resistance. It brings the past forward in a good way, allowing the future can be guided by wisdom rather than haunted by unresolved grief.

My journey as a Métis educator has been one of remembering what was meant to be erased. In that remembering, I find both direction and hope. I carry a vision of curriculum as ceremony—one where ghosts become ancestors with lessons to impart, where knowledge moves and breathes, where care and kinship guide our teaching, where each child's spirit is honoured, where the land is both classroom and relative, and where our imagination soars toward the world we need.

This is the story I will continue to tell—the truth I will ensure is no longer left untold.

Epilogue—We Remember

We remember
the ones who whispered lessons in the wind,
the children who learned beneath trees,
the grandmothers who sang without words.

We remember
that story is ceremony,
that learning is love in motion,
that the land still hums the old songs
for those who stop to listen.

We remember
that ghosts are not gone —
they are guides,

teaching us to walk with tenderness
through the smoke of our histories.

We remember
that every child carries a star within,
and when we teach in a good way,
the sky fills again with light.

May our classrooms be circles,
our words offerings,
our steps prayers.

May we teach as the land teaches —
with patience, with laughter, with care.

For in remembering,
we begin again.

Biography

Cindy Chartrand is a Métis educator, scholar, and mother of four with deep family roots in the Interlake region of Manitoba. A citizen of the Manitoba Métis Federation, she carries forward the teachings of her grandparents and ancestors, grounding her work in kinship, memory, and land. Cindy has taught for more than twenty years in Manitoba and Alberta, bringing Métis traditions, storytelling, and ceremony into her classrooms.

She holds a Master of Education in Policy Studies with a focus on Indigenous Peoples' Education from the University of Alberta and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Learning at the University of Calgary. Her research explores curriculum as ceremony, blood memory, maternal pedagogy, and Indigenous futurities. She has contributed to national conversations on Indigenous education through her research and writing, with a focus on affirming curriculum as a living practice of love, kinship, and relational accountability.

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