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Connecting the Strands of Wampum

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This paper documents the development of my philosophies and strategies as I formed a methodology for teaching social studies content about Native Americans in New York State. Encompassed within this was an analysis and overview of current elementary school Native studies pedagogical practices, as well as a review of several thinkers who have weighed in on this subject. My emphasis was on developing those topics that Native community members have voiced as significant, and that also are able to address the state standards that teachers need to meet in their classrooms. Simultaneously, I worked to choose means of representing those ideas that make Native people contemporary and that reflect a diversity of opinions.

The topic that emerged within this framework was wampum: the means by which Native people in this region marked important treaties and occasions of historical importance. Because these treaties have deep implications for life today, wampum still holds great value for many Native people. Wampum has many other meanings as well that range from the sacred to the ornamental. It comes from a natural source and serves multiple roles within the functioning government and social structure of the Haudenosaunee, so it satisfies the standard that asks students to consider how Native Americans met their needs using locally available resources. Through collecting the words and thoughts of Native men and women who are invested in wampum, I created lesson plans that attempt to express this range of ideas and understandings of wampum’s value. While the example fleshed out within this document is quite specific, the approach itself can be applied to any Native studies unit.
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Rationale

Moving toward an understanding of how to fairly and accurately represent various facets of indigenous cultures through curriculum has been an academic, professional, and personal journey for me. My investment in this topic stems simultaneously from my mixed Seneca/European ancestry, and my understanding of historic representational injustices. Having spoken with numerous Native and non-Native men and women about the inaccuracies, omissions, and stereotypes presented in schools, I’ve known for some time that curriculum reform is a topic in which many people are invested. My current assignment at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in New York is to develop curricula that will provide students with information about Haudenosaunee culture and history not typically covered in depth in textbooks. Knowing that the museum has the capacity to disseminate these materials widely adds an additional layer of responsibility and pride to this work. But my personal investment in the topic doesn’t automatically mean that what I create will reflect the goal of providing an accurate representation of Haudenosaunee culture and history. I needed first to grapple with the content as well as understand how curricula about Native people had been presented in the past to find my entry into the material. As I gained sensitivity to the subtleties of authorship, representation, and student engagement, I was able to form a
methodological approach that reflects my values and supports the goals I am trying to achieve in this work.

In order to develop this curriculum approach, it was necessary for me to first reflect on the rationales that have typically shaped elementary school teachers' studies of Native Americans. Why do teachers study the clothing and dwellings of Native people and not the stories of individuals? Why is it assumed that students are more interested in studying the tools of war than the tools of food preparation? Why do teachers study Native Americans at the beginning of the school year alongside the mastodons? Why do teachers ask that students study Native Americans at all? This last question often comes back to a rather simplistic answer related to the state's mandates, but the "why" for how teachers approach this content is more complicated. Understanding teachers’ pedagogical reasoning and reflecting upon ways to improve the methodology for how this content is taught drove my studies.

The background necessary for understanding the need for this work is rooted in the public’s often-limited understanding of Native Americans. Native people have long established the need to redress stereotypes and for the general public to better
understand indigenous culture, history and current events. Raise the topic of stereotypes when you catch us in the right mood and everyone will have a story to share: “He didn’t believe me when I told him that I was Seneca. He said he thought we were all gone.” Or the ever popular “She wanted to know if we still live in teepees.” Usually these comments come as innocent-enough expressions of not being familiar with the culture. More often than not, they imply ignorance rather than denigration of or anger toward Native Americans. The real vitriol comes out in the modern world’s forum for anonymity and animus, the comments section that follows many online articles about contemporary Native American issues. It is there that we get to witness the depth of racism toward Native Americans that still exists. For example, many comments reflect the assumptions that no one works, that everyone is an alcoholic, and that Native people are living a high-on-the-hog lifestyle that goes along with not paying property taxes.

Countering stereotypes has its own implicit virtue simply in that it promotes dissemination of the truth. However, in order to counter the frequent “what’s the harm in all of it?” argument in defense of an attacked mascot or fashion label, it is necessary to address the detrimental consequences of seeing any group of people as inferior or
even nonexistent. Our representation as a part of the past denies the validity of our
claims and concerns in the present. As Native Appropriations blogger Adrienne Keene
(2012a; see also Keene, 2012b) put it so succinctly,

How can we expect mainstream support for sovereignty, self-determination, Nation
Building, tribally-controlled education, health care, and jobs when 90% of Americans
only view Native people as one-dimensional stereotypes, situated in the historic
past, or even worse, situated in their imaginations?

Stereotypes are hurtful and offensive to Native people on a personal level, but they are
damaging on a societal level when policies that directly impact Native political and
environmental sovereignty have the potential to be affected by a collective denial of
Native relevancy in contemporary life.

These depictions originate from a vast and complex network of sources. Caricatures of
Native Americans are perpetuated through film, cartoons, novels, mascots, greeting
cards, children’s games, Halloween costumes, and multiple other expressions of popular
culture. Perhaps most damaging, though, are the inaccurate depictions that permeate
educational materials, because they come with an implied accuracy in that they are
disseminated through teachers, figures that students are taught to entrust as truth-
bearers. While the more blatantly problematic images of Native Americans as scalping savages have been removed from textbooks, the remaining imagery perpetuates the public imagination of us as loincloth-wearing simpletons. Even though it seems at times that this topic has been beaten to death and that the case has been so thoroughly and repeatedly made for why these images are hurtful, each year a new crop of offenders adds fuel to the fire and makes clear that this battle is far from over. Within the past year alone, two major recording artists (Snoop Dogg, Gwen Stefani) produced videos with deeply offensive images of Native culture (ICTMN Staff, 2012; Geller 2012); two large fashion houses (Gap, Paul Frank) manufactured clothing with imagery or information depicting Native Americans that was objectionable enough that public protests forced them to pull their products (ICTMN Staff, 2013); Halloween product designers created a new crop of costumes that demeaned and hyper-sexualized Native women (ICTMN Staff, 2013); and in my survey of textbooks and trade books used by elementary school teachers in New York (Corwin, 2013), 90% had either factual errors or inaccurate imagery (see Appendix A). In short, these issues are alive and well.

Most would agree that education has the potential to play a critical role in rectifying these antiquated, narrow views of Native culture. Teachers have the opportunity to
frame students’ earliest encounters with Native Americans, but if they themselves have had little contact with Native people, they are at a disadvantage in being able to provide accurate representations of the culture, people, or history. Teachers are dependent on the age-appropriate educational materials available to them. Textbooks and other educational materials rank high in terms of culpability in this big picture of misrepresentation. Even the best-intentioned teachers must work with the limited resources that are currently on the market that rarely include information about Native people in the present. Having read widely on this topic and having listened to many individual’s opinions on it, the critiques I’ve most often heard raised about the current Native studies curriculum are fourfold:

• the lack of contemporary depictions of Native Americans

• the lack of profiles of specific Native American individuals on par with the profiles of white individuals typically found in textbooks

• the omission of injustices from history, or the sense that stories have been watered down

• a lack of specificity, or the over-generalization of cultural depictions
To give context to this investigation, it is necessary to both survey the work of other educators who have tackled this topic previously, as well as to provide an overview of the actual materials currently made available to elementary school educators.
Review of Literature

As others have grappled with ways to redress inequities in the curriculum, they have had to make similar journeys through the legacies of representation to find their own tactics for approaching the material. In *Out of the Classroom and into the World*, Sal Vascellaro’s case study follows the path of a teacher developing a Native studies unit in Long Island. The book as a whole addresses ways that field trips and “educating from experience” can capture the imaginations of teachers and students alike. Based on his observations of teachers developing social studies units, Vascellaro (2011) reached this general impression:

> too often, the content of a social studies curriculum grows primarily from chapters in a textbook – the reading of the chapter and the answering of the questions at the end. Or teachers simply follow a script in a teacher’s guide or the instructions of the “consultants.” Frequently when researchers do research a topic, they first search the wealth of possibilities offered by the Internet. The problem is that the research too often ends there – without penetrating the wealth of resources around them.

This is true with the study of any culture or people. In fact, the access that the Internet provides for connecting with people means that there really is no excuse to not reach beyond the textbooks to contact people from any community being studied. If, for example, one is situated in an area like Long Island where Native people are available to
consult, every effort should be made to have first-hand exchanges with individuals, and in lieu of that, phone calls and emails can suffice.

The teacher profiled in Out of the Classroom and into the World reached out to the tribal historian from the Shinnecock Nation to get consultation about how she should approach the material. Of primary importance before teaching any culturally driven study is consultation with people from the community to communicate which stories they feel are worth telling. While it is problematic that this woman allowed a single person to speak for the community as a whole, she did at least make that connection and used his advice as a guideline for how to proceed. Rather than coming to this historian with a prescribed list of topics that she needed him to elaborate on, she listened to him make the case for what he felt was a priority to be represented.

Columbia Journalism School Dean of Academic Affairs Bill Grueskin, who spoke on a panel at Columbia recently, where he was addressing how to approach reporting in Indian Country (Vinciguerra, 2013), recommended a similar approach. He said

Don’t go with a specific story in mind, just say “What’s on your mind? Who should I be reading? Who should I be talking to?”, and . . . just listen and then do it again and eventually . . . they will start talking to you. But if you go in saying “I want to do a story about X,” what you’re basically telling these people is “I’ve already decided what the
story is, and if you could provide me the characters, the quotes and the color, then I can file it by five pm.”
(transcribed from my recording of the panel discussion)

To round out my methodology, I would combine the participant-based approaches to learning of Vascellaro and Grueskin with that of Oneida professor Carol Cornelius as described in *Iroquois Corn in a Culture-Based Curriculum* (Cornelius, 1988). Cornelius refers to one of the key criteria for developing a culture-based curriculum as a “bottoms up” method that she has termed Multiple Perspectives – The Team Approach. In this method, multiple key figures from any given community to be studied are approached to hear their perspectives on what stories and themes are worth pursuing. The inherent benefit of consulting with members of any given community about what aspects of their culture are important today is that the topics they raise as important are by definition “contemporarily relevant,” so the goal of addressing cultural continuity and even contemporary existence is automatically achieved through the utilization of their living voices. Cornelius (1998) is explicitly clear that the idea of an expert as it has typically been termed, meaning someone with a degree or specific credentials, is not applicable when talking about identifying who carries the unofficial title of “expert” within a community. As she puts it, “Including the elders and tribal leaders expands the definition of ‘expert’ by including the culture bearers as significant and legitimate
sources of knowledge." She further clarifies that culture bearers have typically been consulted by academics as informants, not as ongoing authorities on any given subject. This panel of experts should be consulted throughout the whole curriculum process so that they might best steer material and content in a direction that truly matches their intentions and the best interests of the community. The number of consultants is key because when determining what is of value to any community, it is important to hear a multitude of voices. While someone may have a position that seems to imply authority from an outsider’s perspective, such as the tribal historian consulted in Sal Vascellaro’s book, that person may or may not have the general approval of the community to speak on their behalf. Meeting with many people, and applying some good judgment as to who seems widely respected within the community, can help one to start to glean which consultants might best weigh in on a given subject.

The work of Carol Cornelius has informed my thinking about elementary school Native studies curriculum. Cornelius talks extensively in *Iroquois Corn in a Culture-Based Curriculum* about the need to focus the study of Native Americans using culturally significant themes that are reflective of the world view of any given group. In thinking
about typical approaches to the study of Native people that focus solely on material culture, she has this to say:

an aspect of the culture becomes an artifact only when it is disconnected from its place within the web of relationships and taught separately. Using a thematic focus provides a way to counteract stereotypes of the culture by examining specific cultures as holistic entities. . . . Instead of isolating an item from its culture, the item becomes the center of the circle and connects to all the components. The thematic focus includes not only the specific topic, but the dynamic nature of that topic within the culture and the interaction between cultures.

In other words, as in the example detailed in Cornelius’s book, corn was chosen as a topic to develop study units around because she had consulted with culture bearers within the community and knew it to be something deeply valued by the majority of Haudenosaunee people. If she were to represent this theme solely through objects related to corn, much would not translate to the student. A corn pounder isolated on a museum pedestal, or on the page of a textbook, cannot represent Haudenosaunee culture as a whole. Contextualizing the corn pounder by providing information that communicates the role corn plays in the cosmology, stories, ceremonies, and diet of the Haudenosaunee brings light to the larger significance of corn in the culture, and thus significance to the object. Cornelius created a chart that shows the components all
cultures have in common (see figure). To test if any given topic is fundamentally important to the culture, see if it is significant in many or most of these various cultural components. If a topic only proves to be meaningful in one small cultural component, it’s likely not worthy of being put forth as an emblematic component of the culture.

![All Cultures Chart](image)

**Figure 4.1.** All Cultures Chart: Cultural Components of All Cultures


Important too within this thinking is the creation of a curriculum that not only serves to educate the general public, but that allows Native people to feel a sense of ownership and pride in seeing themselves reflected in textbooks and classrooms. As teachers we
need to be careful that we do not presume the lens through which students are viewing the content we create. A student with native ancestry will not necessarily present themselves to the teacher or class, and they shouldn’t have to. Should the student or their family offer to contribute to the class’s study unit, that should certainly be encouraged. The teacher should not, however, single them out as a spokesperson in any Native studies unit because they should not assume that they will have prior knowledge on a given topic.

An article by Emily Style (1988) speaks to the need for curriculum to have both “windows” and “mirrors,” meaning that it provides opportunities to see into other cultures and to allow students to see reflections of themselves. As she says,

Now the common sense of needing to provide both windows and mirrors in the curriculum may seem unnecessary to emphasize, and yet recent scholarship on women and men of color attests abundantly to the copious blind spots of the traditional curriculum. White males find in the house of curriculum many mirrors to look in and few windows which frame others’ lives. Women and men of color on the other hand find almost no mirrors of themselves in the house of curriculum.

This is especially true in the case of Native studies curriculum, which rarely presents individuals for students to connect with in a positive way. Not every profile has to be a
role model, and in fact a variety of individuals with varying professions, accomplishments, and stories should be presented to provide a range of mirrors for students to see.

If there are no mirrors provided, and even at times if there are, a student with Native ancestry studying their own culture from a non-Native teacher will likely feel frustrated and uncomfortable with the complicated layers of authority and representation that are at play in that scenario if the material presented is not chosen carefully. Debbie Reese, creator of the widely lauded blog American Indian in Children’s Literature, presents the problem this way (Reese, 2013a):

What I think happens with a lot of this literature is that kids are reading books given to them by teachers . . . that don’t know that they are doing harm in the selection of their books when they are driven by romantic ideas of who Indians are. . . . [Native students] don’t see good representation of them, their people and their history in the textbooks and children’s books in school, so they disengage.

Teachers are at a disadvantage to create these moments of “mirrored” reflection for students, in that the materials available to them written with sensitive authorship from a Native perspective are few and far between. An overview follows of some of these
materials that are available, as well as the history and complexity of how Native Americans are taught about in elementary schools in New York.

**Background to Studies of Native Peoples**

The study of Native people from New York has been integral to elementary school curriculum across the state for over 80 years. Fourth and seventh grade teachers in New York annually present units on the Haudenosaunee and Algonquian Native peoples who live and once lived in this region. While work has been done over the past few decades to redress the stereotypes, omissions, and inaccuracies that have historically permeated elementary school Native Studies curricula, much of the work has been additive rather than a structural reworking of content. This section seeks to summarize and critique existing methods and materials used for Native studies units in New York classrooms.

It is common to hear people talking about the need for teachers to “teach to the standards,” but what that actually means in New York State has grown more complicated in recent years. Traditionally, standards have been developed by New York State’s Education Department (hereafter NYSED) and enforced by state
education agencies (New York State Education Department, 2011). Across the state, teachers develop their own social studies content that meets these standards, whereas in New York City, the Department of Education (DOE) has developed specific curricula to model lesson plans that address these state standards. This is referred to as the city’s “scope and sequence.” The scope indicates the amount and type of content that will be covered on a given topic, and the sequence, logically enough, is the order in which the lesson plans should be taught. Teachers in New York City are not required to teach these exact lesson plans, but they provide a framework from which they can draw.

In January of 2011, New York State adopted the Common Core State Standards Initiative, a national program developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors’ Association Center for Best Practices. As of May 2013, the Common Core had been adopted by over 90% of all states. The Common Core initiative currently has mathematics and language arts standards, so it impacts social studies only where language arts and literacy strands overlap with the curriculum. In coming years, however, the Common Core initiative will release social studies standards that will directly affect how curricula are developed and taught. In reality, most schools
will not purchase new textbooks and trade books to meet these new standards; lesson plans that have been developed previously will continue to be used in some form.

Along with the state and city standards, the National Council for the Social Studies, “the largest association in the country devoted solely to social studies education [that] engages and supports educators in strengthening and advocating social studies,” developed their own standards (National Council for the Social Studies, 2010). There is considerable overlap between their standards and those currently enforced by the state.

The New York City DOE currently recommends that teachers cover social studies in 45-minute periods, starting with three per week for grades K-2, four periods per week for grades 3-5, and one period every day for grades 6-8. Students maintain this schedule of one period of social studies per day throughout high school. Some private schools have separate social studies teachers, but the vast majority of the elementary education social studies curriculum throughout the state is taught by classroom teachers who also cover every other subject throughout the day. Time constraints for test preparation force teachers to minimize explorations into culture through media that do not
simultaneously reinforce other skill sets. Teachers incorporate literacy, language arts, and skills such as map and graph reading into their social studies content.

The New York State NYSED Social Studies standards are organized into five broad subject areas: 1) History of the United States and New York; 2) World History; 3) Geography; 4) Economics; 5) Civics, Citizenship, and Government. Each subject area has a standard statement at levels called elementary, intermediate, and commencement. The New York City DOE curricula utilize the same five areas but make the recommendations specific to each grade. In addition, they include performance indicators. The subject area numbers are used in the designations (see Appendix B for a detailed listing of standards).

**Social Studies Standards Applied by Grade**

Every fourth and seventh grade New York teacher does a social studies unit on Native Americans that lasts from one to three months. Content about Native Americans is compartmentalized to specific time units rather than integrated throughout the year. A survey of teachers in New York revealed that the fall season is when most teachers focus on this unit (Corwin, 2012).
The focus of the fourth grade social studies curriculum in New York is on local history and local government. All subjects, from the American Revolution to the Constitution, are covered as they relate to New York and its inhabitants. It follows logically within this context that New York State teachers would cover the Native people of New York, specifically the Algonquian Indians and the Haudenosaunee. The structure of the fourth grade year and where Native American studies falls within it is important both philosophically and in understanding how the studies are framed to meet the state standards.

The first chapters of all New York fourth-grade textbooks cover landforms, maps, and ecosystems of the state to ground the narrative about the state’s history within its geography. The standard that gets the most attention here is 3.1e: “Investigate how people depend upon and modify the physical environment.” The text then proceeds to cover the topics of the state in chronological order. “Origins of man” are touched upon in nearly every textbook, museum exhibition, and trade book, and without fail they present the Bering Strait theory as the explanation of the origins of indigenous people, without discussion of how creation is perceived from a Native perspective. The story of
migration from Asia along with the requisite mastodons and cavemen lead us into the chapter on Native lifeways. Native American lifeways typically get broken down into the following categories: food (agriculture and hunting), clothing, shelter, village layouts, religion/spirituality, relationship to the natural world, government systems, and traditions (ceremonies). While there are brief mentions of Native Americans throughout the other sections of the textbooks, this chapter comprises the majority of the pages devoted to the study of Native people. The placement of Native Americans at the beginning of the state’s timeline and with a precontact depiction of lifeways implies that Native people are part of the state’s early history, minimizing their existence in the present.

The march of implied progress within the textbooks from “discoveries of explorers” (alternate terms: maritime capitalists, colonizers) on to the formation of colonies and later “growth of the nation” marks a clear linear chronological narrative. Once Europeans have expanded into the rest of the state and Native Americans have been relegated to reservation lands, they are rarely mentioned again. The exception to this in recent years is the inserted content about contemporary Native Americans, generally included within a textbook chapter on ancestral lifeways. After detailed descriptions of
the food, clothing, and shelter of Native Americans prior to contact, there is often a page with profiles of modern individuals. As the textbooks have a clear chronological order, this inclusion can feel confusing and out of place because contemporary living individuals are followed by descriptions of colonial America.

Seventh graders cover many of the same topics that are studied in fourth grade, but at a deeper level. They start the year with a wide survey of Native communities across the country, looking at cultural differences based on regions. They study the Iroquois and Algonquians alongside the Plains, Southwest, Pacific, and Northwest Indians. Seventh graders return to the colonial period and early contact between Native Americans and colonists. One of the key questions asked during this time is “What was the impact of European exploration on the Americas’ land and people?” but “impact” is never directly addressed within these units in terms of war, treaties, land loss, or disease. The influence of the Iroquois confederacy is touched upon often in the winter, and Native Americans are again discussed in February in terms of treaties, when teachers are focused on national growth.
Analysis of Textbooks

While much has been done over the past five years to put a contemporary spin on the Native American content within textbooks, the legacy of the “vanishing race” presentations that marked this content when it was first introduced into school curricula in the 1930s remains. Stories are often told in a precontact time frame, but are labeled simply as “long ago,” and timelines often have wide gaps that may jump hundreds or even tens of thousands of years.

Also problematic is the perspective that assumes a nonnative audience with story lines such as “Imagine you live among the Iroquois.” Verb tense on the whole remains an issue, as textbooks and other supplementary classroom books often shift between past and present tenses. More egregious still are the factual errors that permeate the texts: inaccurate vocabulary, housing, regalia, and story lines exist in almost all the books currently on the market. One book, Iroquois Nation, Life of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Nation, 2003), is exemplary of the range of errors that exist in contemporary textbooks, from the title (“Iroquois nation” singular is incorrect) to a cover image of a man in a Plains-style war bonnet, to the teepees that are shown as part of a village near a river.
Central to the telling of these stories in text and trade books are the images that represent the faces, scenes, and objects associated with the study of Native Americans. This is important, because images have an especially critical role in shaping children’s perception, and this is when many New York City students are seeing images of Native Americans for the first time in an academic setting. These images are often the most problematic parts of the books because the photographers and illustrators are rarely Native, so the lens of those generating this imagery is literally from the outsider’s perspective. Individuals are rarely named, groups of people often look like indistinguishable generic figures, and because many of the illustrations are themselves from hundreds of years ago, they contribute to the dated sense that they are representing people from the past.

Textbooks often do not hire illustrators to create imagery for their books, but draw from stock imagery resources such as Corbis or Getty images, museum collections, and historic royalty-free images. This means that the same images are often presented in multiple textbooks, with the only fact-checking agent being a corporation who has profits at stake if their images are deemed inappropriate or inauthentic. The two most
common issues in book illustrations are inaccurate regalia and the representation of sacred ceremonial objects that are not meant to be displayed (Reese, 2013b).

Students are often asked to compare and contrast content involving Native Americans, but at times the groups discussed are not comparable. The term “Algonquians” represents a language group with diverse tribal cultures that span a large area. The Haudenosaunee have political and cultural alliances that make their history quite different from the Algonquians, but students are repeatedly asked in textbooks and lesson plans what these two groups have in common and what makes them different (see figures in Appendix C).

Timelines when used in the context of teaching about Native Americans can also be a misleading teaching tool. Timelines often show gaps of thousands of years between alleged arrival to New York State and contemporary figures. This returns to the idea that recent textbooks do show that Native Americans exist in the present day, but there is little information on what happened between precontact times and today.
Methodology

As a child, in 6th grade my class did a study unit on Alaskan Natives that was part of a social studies curriculum known as MACOS (Man, a Course of Study) where the final project I chose was to recreate some traditional tools of the Inuit. I lovingly whittled sticks to make the prongs on a leister (a fishing spear) and cut an aluminum can with tin snips to represent the blade of an ulu (a rounded knife). I was unaware of the complexity of myself as a Native student learning about another indigenous culture through my non-Native teacher. What I was aware of was the wholly positive visceral connection I made with the materials and tools of another culture, which brought that lesson to life for me. However, in spite of that, I didn’t take away any deep understanding of the role hunting played in Inuit culture, or even any specific knowledge about the region where the group I was learning about came from. Reflecting on this recently helped shape my thinking about my own curriculum. I knew that I would like to create similar experiential connections for students with materials, tools, and other physical objects and processes, but that I needed to build much broader connections for them, so that they wouldn’t leave with the impression that artifacts alone represented the culture.
I held onto this insight and simultaneously attempted to incorporate elements of the methodology outlined in the literature review as I established the framework for my approach. Having consulted with several Native people from the New York region, I repeatedly heard that people felt wampum was a topic worthy of exploration for curriculum because of its deep historic significance and contemporary relevance. I tested the topic through Cornelius’s All Cultures Chart, where it proved to have significance in many areas. Wampum is relevant in at least the following topics: oral tradition, land ethics, worldview, health system, government, economy, history, and contemporary cultural continuity. It also provides an entry point into many important areas of Haudenosaunee history and culture, such as the formation of the confederacy, treaties, ceremonies, condolence, and sovereignty.

In order to think about how to communicate wampum’s meaning, I did what most people would do when starting to work on a topic to teach: I read about it on websites, in articles, and in books. I scoured the Internet for other lesson plans that might have been made using wampum. I also read Native authors’ writings on the topic and looked over the results of surveys completed by Seneca community members. In short, I attempted
to become an expert on the topic. But this effort raised for me what would be the first
of many problematic issues in undertaking this curriculum writing process. The concept
of being an expert on any given topic is something I have struggled with before, as many
teachers do. I long to feel total mastery on any given subject before getting in front of
others to talk about it. The problematic logic within this thinking though, is that certain
topics cannot be mastered in the same way that geometry can. When you are dealing
with a topic that has personal significance for many thousands of people, there is no
single perspective that you can put forth as the absolute truth. Certain basic facts about
the topic are indisputable, such as the source of the materials, or the location of certain
belts today, but when you get into the meaning for individuals, “facts” become more
difficult to define.

This helped me to realize that this concept of expertise is particularly problematic when
teaching about the culture or history of Native Americans in general. No one individual
can carry the title of expert simply because of the extent of research he or she has
done, and not even necessarily because of the amount of time they have spent in any
given community, or because of a shared ancestry. As much as I had read on the topic,
and as much as I feel invested in my family’s community, it felt problematic for me to
summarize information about wampum in a lesson plan, in essence giving myself the implied title of “expert” through my authorship. This unsettled feeling was duly noted, and I would return to thinking about this throughout my curriculum development process, as I tried to problem-solve strategies that might allow me to better share authorship with a community.

I was simultaneously considering how I would connect these wampum lessons to the state standards. As I detailed earlier, one of the core questions teachers are asking when they study Native Americans is how they traditionally met their needs using the resources available to them. If we look at the complexity of the concept of “needs” as extending beyond food, clothing, and shelter into diplomacy and interpersonal and emotional needs, wampum is perfectly suited to address this question. Indeed, meeting the standard in this deeper, more nuanced way that speaks to the complexity of precontact cultures pushes teachers out of the stagnant survival paradigm of representation. The topic of wampum also provides opportunities to delve into multiple areas of interest for teachers besides just social studies, such as geography, botany, and history. It is therefore a worthy candidate for this sort of holistic approach to
representing an object that is important to a Native community, that has significance in multiple facets of the culture, and that can still meet the needs of educators.

In order to ultimately explain the origin of wampum or how it is made, it is necessary to first establish for students its importance. Providing context for wampum comes naturally through the telling of the Peacemaker story, which recounts the history of how the confederacy of the Five Nations initially came together (Parker, 1916). Within this tale, an Onondaga war chief Tadodaho kills Hianwenta’s (often referred to as Hiawatha) wife and daughters. Hianwenta, a community organizer of sorts, goes to the woods to mourn his loss, and it is there that Peacemaker brings wampum to help heal him, starting a practice that continues to this day to heal someone who has lost a loved one known as the condolence ceremony. Later, when the Five Nations have come together in peace, the Guswenta Hianwenta, a wampum belt, is created to commemorate the alliance. The imagery of that belt is used to this day in flags, on T-shirts, and as a general symbol of Haudenosaunee pride. In the telling of this one tale, an educator is able to communicate two of the key uses of wampum: as a means to heal someone, and as a way of marking an important event in the form of a belt. It’s also important to note that Haudenosaunee people generally agree that the Peacemaker established the value of wampum in these
instances, so this story explains wampum’s significance in a way that is known and accepted by contemporary Haudenosaunee men and women. That the reasoning behind wampum’s value can be so precisely taught further makes the case for it being something worthy of study.

Geography is critical to the understanding of wampum because the primarily landlocked Haudenosaunee communities would not have had access to an object that originates from the Atlantic Ocean, were it not for intertribal trade. Travel by boat along the Hudson and Mohawk rivers allowed coastal tribes such as the Shinnecock, Wampanoag, Mohegan, Unkechaug, Pequot, and Narragansett to trade with the Haudenosaunee. Any curriculum that includes the source of wampum and those tribes who used it needs illustrative maps to help students understand the route wampum traditionally traveled.

Conveying all this content in a way that is engaging to the average fourth grader is a tall order. It is an ever-evolving process that I am continually attempting to improve upon. In fact, due to the complexity of the subject matter, I ultimately decided that while certain content was appropriate for 4th graders, other concepts wouldn’t be readily absorbed until 7th grade or later. Whichever age is being taught, the average visitor or
student is often coming to this topic with no prior knowledge about wampum, so it is necessary to provide the content in layers that build up from the physical to the conceptual.

Indeed, this is the challenge of this topic in that it is simultaneously the very definition of material culture, as it is something vital to a community that takes a physical form, and yet that embodies multiple metaphysical concepts. Indeed it is for this reason that it’s so important to use a contextualized approach that connects any objects of material cultural value to multiple aspects of the lived culture. As an object, isolated from context, purple and white beads woven into a belt have little to no meaning for the average viewer. I had the opportunity to observe visitors in an exhibition setting at the New York State Fair, where there were hundreds of daily visitors. For four days there was a display of dioramas depicting traditional longhouses. On the fifth day the display was temporarily changed to high-quality reproduction wampum belts, worth almost $30,000, but with very little context given to them. The active engagement of the audience commenting, pointing, and observing the dioramas at length was followed by complete indifference to the belts. This was surprising to me until I realized that, without context, these belts mean almost nothing beyond their aesthetic value to the
general public. If wampum is to have meaning for students or anyone outside of the
culture, it needs clear introduction and interpretation.

I was able to test different strategies for providing that context in what is known at
NMAI as the Haudenosaunee Discovery Room where I teach twice a week. I have some
flexibility in the content I cover, as long as it stays relevant to Haudenosaunee culture,
so I decided to use that opportunity to talk with students about wampum. This has given
me a chance to survey students on their prior knowledge about wampum and to gain
insights into what ways of teaching this content are most effective. Though these were
just informal, undocumented surveys, having by now asked dozens of school groups
what they know about this subject, I have a pretty strong sense of what wampum-
related content the average elementary school audience has been exposed to. I
generally hear one of the following four things:

1. Wampum is money.
2. It was made into belts.
3. Wampum can tell a story.
4. Runners would carry it to share a message between villages.
Not surprisingly, these facts closely mirror the content provided in the textbooks. All four of these facts are true, with the caveat that equating wampum to money needs some fleshing out for clarification. What students do not know is that wampum was a trade item that existed long before Europeans arrived. They do not know the meaning of any of the belts that were made, or the connection they had to treaties. They haven’t heard the pivotal role it played in establishing credibility and authority, nor are they familiar with its importance in signifying those who carry the titles of chiefs and clan mothers. They are also not familiar with its role in facilitating the healing of individuals. Moreover, in the process of summarizing “facts” about wampum, students miss out on the wealth of personal associations about the significance of wampum that Native people have carried with them over the generations and into the present.

The reason these various perspectives on the topics are not covered is because there are few educational materials available that provide an understanding of the topic from a Native perspective. Most of the textbooks and broader Haudenosaunee trade books mention wampum on a page or two. An overview of what repeatedly gets said of wampum is listed below:

• The source of the name: the Narragansett word for “string of white beads”: wampumpeag
• Where it comes from (East coast from Maine to Florida, primarily from Massachusetts to New Jersey)
• Types of shell used (whelk and quahog)
• Its use as money
• Descriptions of the beads color and shape and that they were woven into belts
• A sampling of quotes related to purpose of the belts:
  o “they used them to communicate”
  o “tribes gave each other belts as offers of peace or friendship or to call them to war”
  o “to tell stories”
  o “to keep a record of events”
  o “for making peace treaties”
  o “for settling disputes”
  o “the belts recorded agreements between the tribes”
  o “when a sachem spoke to the council, he held wampum”
  o “special people in the tribe knew how to read the symbols”

These facts are not strictly wrong, with the same caveat stated earlier about equating wampum to money. What is missing is the sense of cultural continuity. The words of individuals speaking on the importance of wampum could clearly articulate its contemporary relevance, but they are never found within the pages of textbooks.

I knew that I wanted to employ literacy-based investigations, where students would collectively glean salient points about wampum using different books and pieces of text, but again those books and written pieces simply weren’t available at a grade-appropriate level. It was at that point that I started to realize that before I could possibly
think about constructing the curriculum itself, I needed to first generate the content from which students would draw their lessons. Returning to my goal of collective authorship, I sent an email out to all the Native men and women in my contact list, asking them to respond to the question, “What is the value of wampum to you?” A handful of responses trickled in, but not enough that I could readily say I had a representative sampling of opinions on the topic. I knew that the anonymity of a mass email might not be the most compelling way to get people to buy into contributing, so then I started reaching out to individuals, asking if I could interview them by phone on this topic.

As soon as I started these conversations, I knew this was the direction I needed to proceed in. While asking people to sit down and write a page of text that summarizes their thoughts didn’t produce a significant number of responses, I found that many people were willing to talk for half an hour or more on the topic, given an attentive ear. Listening to people’s stories honors them, and when an educator wants to listen to someone’s stories that ultimately will be shared with students, that is especially meaningful and affirming. Granted, the aforementioned ear, and the mindset of the person attached to it, will play a critical role in the information that will be shared, but I found most people were happy in these conversations to share anecdotes, relay facts,
and give input on this topic. This seemed an especially fitting approach among Haudenosaunee people, because we have a long oral tradition history. By drawing quotations from these consultants’ words, and presenting them to students as something worthy of study, it gets implied that the spoken word has equal value to the written one.

It’s important to clarify that “consultation” is a complex topic for indigenous people studying within their own communities, because insights about topics might come about over dinner, sitting around sewing, or just chatting on the phone. Indeed, it is often in these more informal moments when people will talk candidly about what is on their mind and what is close to their heart. Men will talk about the history wampum holds in community gatherings, and Native people will share personal experiences with wampum when they trust that they are among friends. This raises the importance of using good judgment to determine what confided details are appropriate to share with the public and which are better left private.

As both insider and outsider to Native communities, I need to be aware that the access I’ve been granted in pursuing my curriculum research is not to be taken lightly. I know
that in my current position I am capable of disseminating the projects I create to a wide audience, so the details I choose to put forth must be considered carefully for what they will communicate. The average elementary school teacher should be similarly aware of using good judgment to choose which information provided by consultants they should share with students. This is easily addressed by returning to consultants after lessons have been formed to get their continued feedback on what content they would like to see as part of any final piece.

I am currently in the midst of this process for the curriculum pieces I am developing for the museum. After having spoken with several people by phone, I reached out to some Onondaga contacts to see about speaking in person with people in their community. As the Onondagas are the traditional Keepers of the Wampum, I knew it would be essential for me to learn from elders within their community about wampum’s value. I traveled up one long weekend to their reservation near Syracuse and met and interviewed seven individuals to get input on the layers of meaning that wampum has among other things. Because I am awaiting permission from these participants, I regret that their stories cannot be shared in this thesis, though they will deeply inform the content I create in the coming months, which will ultimately be distributed through the museum.
What I can say is that while I had a high success rate with my phone interviews, many of those participants were friends or friends of friends, so there was already a certain amount of trust established. Because of the legacy of misrepresentation of Native culture from outsiders, there can be a high level of cynicism from Native people when they are asked to share information about their culture. We have a history of people like anthropologists and news reporters being curious about Native culture and then using the information they’ve gathered in ways that do not benefit us. By meeting people in person, it is possible to clearly establish your intention and to build trust with individuals. If your goal is to truly gain insights to help redress some of the inaccuracies of representation that have permeated curriculum in the past, this is a topic in which many Native people are invested, and there’s a good chance that people will gain receptivity to you over time. Two days of interviews with Onondaga men and women provided more insights than two weeks of reading had. It was their thoughts, perspectives and stories combined with those of the others I contacted that ultimately provided the building blocks for starting to create a curriculum that shared authorship amongst us.
Curriculum

Connecting process to resource: learning how wampum is made

Aim:

To give students a sense of both the history and continuity of the craft of making wampum. Using imagery and text provided, students will compare and contrast historic methods of wampum production to those used today. Students will also gain an appreciation for the work involved in creating wampum, and how Native artists modify their process of working over time due to changing technology.

Procedure:

Hand out the two pdf pages to students that show historic wampum making tools, and contemporary tools. Draw students attention to the imagery in the boxes of the two pages which shows the transformation of the quahog shell to a finished object. If building on the previous mapping lesson, remind students the region where these objects came from. If using this unit separately, indicate on a map the coastal regions from Massachusetts to New Jersey. Have students either number next to the images, or cut out and arrange the tools in the order in which they think they would have been used to create either the beads or the earrings. When complete, have students find a partner to pair up with to explain the reasoning for their sequencing.

One way of presenting these ideas follows:

Teacher poses: "Wampum comes from a quahog shell like the one pictured here [indicates on handout]. The quahog clam lives in the sand, near the ocean. Who remembers which tribes were making the most wampum? [remind students of the map work they did in the previous lesson, or share the names of the Shinnecock, Wampanoag, Mohegan, Unkechaug, Pequot, and Narragansett tribes]. Let's try to imagine that we are going to make a bead or a pair of earrings from the quahog shell (indicate on handout). How do you think that would be possible? What steps do you think might be necessary?"

(If students do not start to generate responses, the teacher can provide prompts such as "We can see that the bead is much smaller than the shell. How would we get a smaller piece of shell from this whole shell?" or "We know that both a bead and an earring has to have a hole in
Various prompt that might be used to reflect on this content:

- Provide a definition for a tool (a device that aids in accomplishing a task) and have students think about what properties each of these objects might have that make it a good tool for the job.

- Have students think about which contemporary tools might be “equal” or similar to the tools from the 1600s. [rock for wet saw, bow drill for dremel, pliers for wood “clamp”]

- What clues do we have about which tools were used in the 1600s and which would be used today? [materials they are made from, electricity required to operate them, the way they were manufactured]

- Why would someone choose to use one tool over another? [speed, efficiency, accuracy, control]

After various hypothesis have been offered by the students, the teacher will share information that will explain where each of the historic tools would have come from to help build an understanding of how Native people from this region used locally available resources to perform all the steps of making wampum.

Then hand out the page on wampum artist Dan Loudfoot Simmonds and have students read through his words. Explain that this is a contemporary Mashantucket Pequot artist who makes a living working with wampum, who is carrying on a tradition of wampum making that goes back over 400 years with his tribe. Once students have read through his thoughts, have them reflect on the following question:

**Why would a Native American artist use a different tool today than that which his ancestors used?**

Discuss the assets of both types of tools, and then put a contemporary context into the work Dan does. As a business person competing with other jewelry makers who use modern tools, he needs to work as efficiently and with as much accuracy as possible to produce his product. Discuss the ways that modern tools enable Dan to continue a traditional practice.
tools of the trade:
working with quahog shells in 1650

QUAHOG SHELL  WAMPUM BEADS
tools of the trade:
working with quahog shells today

quahog shell → wampum jewelry

photo and earrings: Dan Loudfoot Simonds
Dan Loudfoot Simonds is an artist, a craftsperson, and a business owner. He was born and raised on his Mashantucket Pequot tribal lands in Connecticut, and now lives in Iowa where he runs his own business making and selling wampum jewelry. He shared some words with us on the process of working with quahog shells.

The best wampum for jewelry comes from a whole shell. They’re not the ones that you would find on the beach. They’re live clams that you actually dig for underneath the sea bed. I live out West now, so my supplier is a Mashpee Wampanoag friend from Cape Cod. He harvests these quahogs for the meat for friends and family. After the shells are clean he sends them off to me in the mail and in return I trade finished jewelry for them.

What I use for cutting quahog shells is a wet saw. That’s a tool you could find at any hardware store. If you look around [the floor and walls] of the bathroom, it’s what all the tiles are cut with. If you are not working wet with the shell, it tends to break and crack. You also don’t want the dust to get around you, because it’s poisonous, and can coat your lungs.

This is similar to how we used to work and make beads way back before power tools were made. Back in the day, there would have been a groove in a rock, and we would have ground our shells back and forth on a strand in the water, so it’s the same kind of concept of working the shell wet.

The next step would be drilling holes. Today what I use for that is a dremel with a diamond bit. The diamond bit allows the shell to be drilled through, which also has to be done under water.

To me, wampum is priceless because most of what I make with it, hopefully, will be around longer than this paper money that we are using.

Wampum is how I make a living and provide for my family and is an art that I hope to hand down to the generations yet to come.
Connecting the Strands of Wampum

breaking up and smoothing the shell

**Quahog Shell**

- **Front**
- **Back**

Chunks of shell get chipped down further and further until they are almost the size of a bead.

That chunk of shell gets rolled back and forth over a rough rock to smooth out all the edges. This would have been done under water to prevent creating toxic dust.

Shells first have to be broken into big pieces.

This rock for breaking up shells is made of feldspar, an extra strong type of rock that is from New York. What other properties does this rock have that make it a good tool?

Each finished bead would take 5-6 hours to make.
Drilling holes into wampum beads

A clamp was made by cutting down a piece of wintergreen wood and splitting it in the middle to form the groove that would hold the wampum bead in place while the hole was drilled.
Recommendations

Of primary importance, and what I hope teachers will take away from reading this paper, is that when we are teaching about anyone else’s culture or history other than our own, we can never forget that we have two invested bodies of people: those we are teaching to and those we are teaching about. Each group comes with its own particular needs and concerns that deserve to be considered and incorporated into our lesson plans and projects. This is best done through consultation and conversation not only to glean what people from any community being studied feel is worthy of exploration, but also to build connections for the teachers with those that they are studying, so that they have a level of personal investment in getting these stories told right.

With students, our primary concerns are engagement and education: capturing their imaginations, and building their investment in a topic such that they will leave having learned some salient points and hopefully having felt inspired enough to produce something of quality on the topic. Simultaneously, if we are good teachers, we care about providing the best version of “the truth” on any given subject that we can provide. As discussed earlier, the truth is challenging to define when teachers attempt to express the lived realities of a large number of people. No one is better equipped to do that
than the people themselves. This is not to dismiss the insights that the teacher brings to this occasion. Teachers know their students and need to find entry points within the information consultants provide that will meet the learning needs of their particular audience.

The challenge of this process, and the challenge of cultural representation in general, is that as soon as anything is written, as soon as any summary is made, there is a limitation in what’s been said: one person’s version of the truth gets put forward. The lesson plan, the text on the gallery wall, and the summary in the textbook are all attempts to capture the fluidity of a community that lives, breathes, and pulses with incredible diversity. Still, knowing that we are working within these limited parameters, we must continue to teach, and to attempt to provide the best content we are capable of, even with its inherent flaws. I feel the path forward to best do this, the way that most genuinely and humbly addresses all of my goals and issues with curriculum, is through capturing the words of individuals. Individuals can speak for themselves. No one can deny that their words are their truth. By communicating the stories, words, and opinions of individuals, we are inherently honoring the multiplicity of voices in any given community. As my friend Terry Jones said on the last day of a class for Seneca youth on the Cattaraugus
reservation that we co-taught, “There is not one person in this room who is the
embodiment of a Seneca. It’s us together...all of us working together...all of our
collective knowledge...all of our outside world experience, we are bringing it back home
and sharing it with one another.” Similarly, by bringing together the voices of many in our
curricula and in our work, we can better start to represent our collective cultural
knowledge on any given topic. I chose to explore the stories, experiences, and opinions
that surround the topic of wampum, but this exploration could have been done on any
given topic that is presented within the textbooks, and furthermore for an individual
aspect of any culture.

If we can use this approach to inform the subtle meanings and nuances of any topic in a
Native studies unit, we will be equipping our students with multiple valuable lessons.
They will automatically understand that Native people are alive and well. Students will
see that culture is shaped by the collective experiences of individuals, and they will
intuitively comprehend that Native people are not monolithic. Above all, this approach
makes us human, gives us texture, and allows us to reclaim the strength and power of
our voices as Native people in a forum where that is long overdue.
References


Simmonds, D., personal communication April 2013


Appendix A

Bibliography of children’s textbooks used for analysis from Corwin (2013).


Appendix B. New York Standards

New York City DOE Social Studies Standards and Performance Indicators (Elementary School Level; Selections Related to Native Americans)

NY City DOE Social Studies Learning Standards and Key Ideas

Representative Social Studies Performance Indicators are those marked with a letter (e.g. 1.1a). They are descriptions of actions that represent an understanding of the standards and are often used by teachers in assessments to mark whether they comprehend the standards.

1. History of the United States and New York

1.1: The study of New York State and United States history requires an analysis of the development of American culture, its diversity and multicultural context, and the ways people are unified by many values, practices and traditions.

1.1a: Know the roots of American culture, its development from many different traditions, and the ways many people from a variety of groups and backgrounds played a role in creating it.

1.2: Important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions from New York State and United States history illustrate the connections and interactions of people and events across time and from a variety of perspectives.

1.2a: Gather and organize information about the traditions transmitted by various groups living in their neighborhood and community.

1.2c: Distinguish between near and distant past and interpret simple timelines.

1.3 Study about the major social, political, economic, cultural, and religious developments in New York State and United States history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups.
1.3a: Gather and organize information about the important accomplishments of individuals and groups, including Native Americans, living in their neighborhoods and communities.

1.4: The skills of historical analysis include the ability to: explain the significance of historical evidence; weigh the importance, reliability and validity of evidence; understand the concept of multiple causation; understand the importance of changing and competing interpretations of different historical developments.

1.4a: Consider different interpretations of key events and/or issues in history and understand the differences in these accounts.

1.4c: View historic events through the eyes of those who were there, as shown in their art, writings, music, and artifacts.

2. World History

2.1: The study of world history requires an understanding of world cultures and civilizations, including an analysis of important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions. This study also examines the human condition and the connections and interactions

2.1b: Explore narrative accounts of important events from world history to learn about different accounts of the past to begin to understand how interpretations and perspectives develop.

2.3a: Understand the roles and contributions of individuals and groups to social, political, economic, cultural, scientific, technological, and religious practices and activities.

2.4b: Explore the lifestyles, beliefs, traditions, rules and laws, and social/cultural needs and wants of people during different periods in history and in different parts of the world.

3. Geography
3.1 Geography can be divided into six essential elements which can be used to analyze important historic geographic, economic, and environmental questions and issues. These six elements include: the world in spatial terms, places and regions, physical settings (including natural resources), human systems, environment and society, and the use of geography.

3.1c: Locate places within the local community, state and nation; locate the Earth’s continents in relation to each other and to principal parallels and meridians.

3.1e: Investigate how people depend on and modify the physical environment.

3.2 Geography requires the development and application of the skills of asking and answering geographic questions; analyzing theories of geography; and acquiring organizing, and analyzing geographic information.

3.2a: Ask geographic questions about where places are located; why they are located where they are; what is important about their locations; and how their locations are related to the location of other people and places.

4. Economics

4.1: The study of economics requires an understanding of major economic concepts and systems, the principles of economic decision making, and the interdependence of economies and economic systems throughout the world.

4.1a: Know some ways individuals and groups attempt to satisfy their basic needs and wants by utilizing scarce resources.

5. Civics, Citizenship and Government

5.1 The study of civics, citizenship, and government involves learning about political systems; the purposes of government and civic life; and the differing assumptions held by people across time and place regarding power, authority, governance, and law.

5.1d: Understand that social and political systems are based upon people’s beliefs.
Appendix C. Imagery from textbooks