

U of T 2009-10 Aboriginal Initiatives Funding Report-Back

Success Stories and Key Deliverables

MTCU requires institutions to report-back on the use of funds allocated for Aboriginal initiatives. In addition, the Ministry often looks for success stories to share internally and in public communications opportunities. To help to tell our story on how MTCU's funding was used in 2009-10, and highlighting major accomplishments, deliverables, success stories, and lessons learned, please provide a brief summary below of the initiatives and events supported by this funding.

Faculty: Information

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Success Stories and Key Deliverables in 2009-10: The On Demand Book Service

In March 2010, the University made available funds from the 2009-10 Council on Aboriginal Initiatives allocation for two initiatives related to the On Demand Book Service (ODBS): 1) purchasing and shipping ODBS-related equipment to First Nations communities in remote and isolated areas of Northern Ontario (\$30k); and 2) a public event/workshop on reading and literacy issues, with a special focus on the provision of information resources and services (featuring the ODBS and other related reading technologies and initiatives) (\$50k).

The On Demand Book Service initiative is a collaborative project between the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto and Keewaytinook Okimakanak to develop strategies to support the development of information resources and services in remote and rural First Nations. The purpose of the On-Demand Book Service (ODBS) is to support the joy of reading in rural and isolated First Nations communities within the context of learning, knowledge sharing and history recording. Using either free online content via a web portal that is developed by community members, or using content developed by the local community, the user can create physical copies of texts using ODBS printing and bookbinding equipment.

In time, the On Demand Book Service has grown to become a web portal that allows students, community leaders and members of the community to reflect together on issues of access to materials, reading, and library and information services in remote and isolated areas of Northern Ontario. It remains a work in progress. Prof. Caidi has incorporated the ODBS in many of the courses that she has taught at the Faculty of Information (In Winter 2009 in her "Information and culture in a global context" course (INF 2125) and more recently in her Winter 2010 "Information Workshop" (INF 1004, an

experiential hands-on workshop that allowed the students to engage in real-life projects and in community-based research)).

The ODBS has been in the works since 2006, thanks to our longstanding collaboration with Keewaytinook Okimakanak (KO) members (particularly our colleague Brian Beaton and Brian Walmark, whose support has been unwavering and essential). A first workshop was held under the aegis of the ODBS back in 2006 with the then-Lieutenant Governor James Bartleman opening the day. Since then, we have continued our reflection and learning about the challenges and promises of reading in FN communities and explored the promises of an on demand book service approach.

- **ODBS EQUIPMENT**

With the \$30k funding received, we were able to ship three complete sets of On Demand Book Service equipment –and related technologies- to three Northern Ontario communities (one was Keewaywin; the other two were sent to Thunder Bay, and the KO team will assist in identifying two other needy communities to send the ODBS to). The full set of equipment included: a computer station, an all-in-one colour laser printer and scanner, a thermo book binder, a DIY book binder, a prototype of a DIY book scanner, portable e-tablets, as well as associated Adobe software.

In addition to the equipment that was shipped to the communities, a selected list of titles was compiled by our students in consultation with community partners based on the survey of reading preferences that the students from a previous course offering designed and administered. All in all, 10 copies each of 30 titles (from an Aboriginal publishing house) were purchased and shipped to three different communities (again, Keewaywin and the two others to Thunder Bay for later distribution).

Finally, we were able to send facilitators amongst the students to three sites (Thunder Bay, Sioux Lookout and Keewaywin) to set up the equipment, to assist community members in working out the details of the ODBS equipment, and moderate on the day of the public event. Many participants expressed their deep appreciation at having face to face meetings with many of our facilitators.

As an example, a follow-up email communication with our coordinator from Keewaywin read as follows:

“Nadia: All in all it was an awesome day for the participants from Keewaywin. It would be beneficial if that interest could be harnessed to sustain the enthusiasm that is being generated by the visit of Margaret and Amine. The people would like to see the two come back and do more training, maybe get the staff from other programs and community members involved. If the present funding permits we can ask Margaret and Amin to come in couple months? Any thoughts?” (R. Mason, personal communication, March 29, 2010).

- **ODBS PUBLIC EVENT**

In addition to the shipping of the ODBS equipment, a public event was organized to raise awareness about reading in First Nations communities.

On March 29, 2010 from 9:00-4:00pm, Prof Nadia Caidi and her team of students put together an exciting program on "Reading in First Nations: Infrastructure, Access and Imagination". As can be seen from the **attached poster**, the event took place across Ontario, with physical and virtual nodes.

The aim of the event was to explore the realities, barriers and challenges to reading in/for First Nations communities particularly in remote and isolated areas of Northern Ontario. The meeting was a hybrid of physical and virtual presence (through tele- and videoconferencing) with four nodes: one in Toronto (at the Design Exchange at 236 Bay Street), one in Sioux Lookout, one in Thunder Bay, one in Keewaywin (Northern Ontario) with bridges to Sandy Lake and other locations. The day included keynote speeches, roundtable discussions, as well as demos of various initiatives aimed at enabling reading in First Nations communities (including the on-demand book service; DIY scanners, e-readers, libraries' initiatives, etc.). More information can be found at: <http://odbs.knet.ca><<http://odbs.knet.ca/>>

Famed Aboriginal author Drew Hayden Taylor opened the event by offering a keynote speech that was both inspirational and humbling. The rest of the day was spent engaging with members of various Northern Ontario communities who related the obstacles and challenges to reading in their communities as well as sharing of stories and experiences. Several University of Toronto students were sent to the different communities to demo some of their reading technologies (the Do It Yourself scanner; the low-cost book-binder; a demo of the ODBS-related equipment that was shipped ahead of time to the communities, etc.).

Prof Caidi's efforts over the past few years through On Demand Book Service have provided a wonderful learning opportunity for many of our University of Toronto 's Faculty of Information students. It has been above all a wonderful introduction to and opportunity to engage in meaningful and respectful community-based research. We have been working with our community partners in Northern Ontario for several years on various aspects related to the social impacts of technology as well as on community innovation and networking initiatives. The event on the 29th of March 2010 was a fantastic opportunity to build on this foundation and to engage in discussions surrounding issues of reading and literacy.

Prof Caidi, her colleagues, her contacts, and her students have worked very hard over the month of March 2010 to pull together this event by linking distributed nodes to create from physically dispersed communities a single virtual community for the day to explore issues of reading in and for First Nations communities. I believe that this is a testament to the strong and meaningful relationships that we have built over the past few years.

Attached are two articles on the public event that were written about in the local media: **Sioux Lookout Bulletin** and the **Wawatay News Online**.

The website for the ODBS project is at: www.odbs.knet.ca

N E W S

KNET hosts unique conference to discuss literacy

Shayla Cybulski
STAFF WRITER

KNET Services hosted a unique videoconference session in Sioux Lookout March 29.

At the KNET Services office, Sioux Lookout participants linked up with counterparts in Keewaywin First Nation, Toronto, and Thunder Bay to discuss reading in First Nation communities.

"The main theme of the event is Reading in First Nations: Infrastructure, Access and Imagination," said Nadia Caidi, Associate Professor in the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information. "The aim is to explore the realities, barriers, and challenges to reading in First Nation communities, particularly in remote and isolated areas of Northern Ontario."

The event was a hybrid of physical and virtual presence. At each site, broadcasted to the

other participants and in a webcast, were keynote speeches, discussions, and demonstrations of the different technologies being used to bolster literacy.

Discussion topics included the realities of reading in First Nations, during which participants shared the barriers to literacy they have encountered, and supporting reading in First Nations, in which participants identified possible solutions to the identified barriers.

Each site also had the chance to demonstrate and view equipment being used in each community. In Sioux Lookout, Daniel Reetz, a PhD student studying visual neuroscience, headed an all-day workshop on how to build a do-it-yourself book scanner.

For a few hundred dollars Reetz can put together a sturdy homemade book scanner that is capable and fast enough to scan a 400-page book in

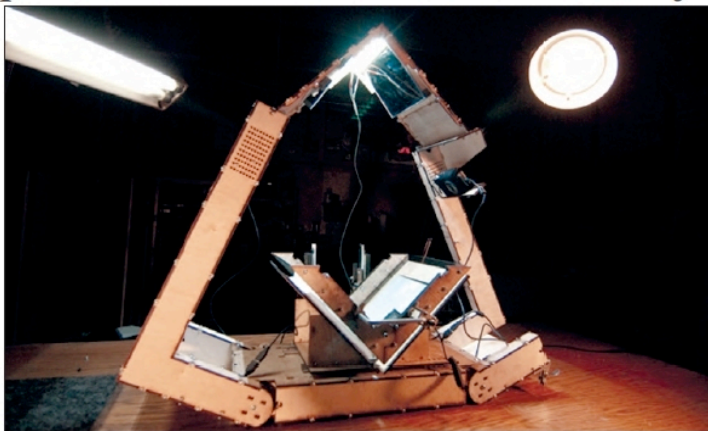


Photo courtesy of KNET

The do-it-yourself book scanner developed by PhD student Daniel Reetz.

less than half an hour. With this technology, the pages are turned into PDF documents, which can be shared, stored on computers and other data devices, or printed.


Sioux Lookout participants also got a look at the On-Demand Book Service (ODBS) equip-

ment that will be sent to remote First Nations. The ODBS equipment, in conjunction with a KNET ODBS portal website, will allow for the printing and binding of digital content. It will also allow people to create and publish their own content, and create digital archives.

"The purpose of the ODBS is to support the joy of reading in rural and isolated First Nation communities within the context of learning, knowledge sharing and history recording. The ODBS portal supports the sharing and access of existing free content and those generat-

ed by the community," reads the ODBS portal website.

The conference was the effort of a collaborative project between the University of Toronto and Keewaytinook Okimakanak, with funds from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

 Wawatay News Online (<http://wawataynews.ca>)

Source URL: <http://wawataynews.ca/node/19757>

KO printing books for youth

Published in [Wawatay Online](#) [1], [April 29, 2010, Volume 37, No. 9](#) [2]

- Previous story: [Weagamow Traditional Days gathering](#) [3]
- Next story: [KO printing books for youth](#) [4]

Keewaytinook Okimakanak plans to print public-domain books this summer for youth from its member communities.

April 29, 2010: Volume 37 #9, Page A12

“It is beneficial for the kids to have these books up there in order to have access to them,” said Renee Loyie, a Lakehead University student who is working on the On Demand Book Service (ODBS) project over the summer at Keewaytinook Okimakanak Research Institute (KORI) in Thunder Bay.

On March 29, the ODBS project held an online workshop in partnership with KNET Services, KORI, Keewaywin Public School and E-Centre, the University of Toronto, and Internet Archive, a non-profit digital library of Internet sites and other cultural artifacts in digital form.

The book service is a web portal that brings together students from the faculty of information, University of Toronto and KO community members to work together on issues related to reading and literacy, said Nadia Caidi, an associate professor in faculty of information studies at the University of Toronto who is working on the ODBS project with Keewaytinook Okimakanak (KO).

“The purpose of the On Demand Book Service is to support the joy of reading in rural and isolated First Nations communities within the context of learning, knowledge sharing and history recording,” Caidi said.

The project involves the use of either free online content through a web portal that is developed by community members, Caidi said, or through the creation of physical copies of texts created by the local community using ODBS printing and bookbinding equipment.



[4]

Renee Loyie shows a couple of the books printed by Keewaywinook Okimakanak through the On Demand Book Service project to increase literacy rates in the communities.

-Rick Garrick - Wawatay News

The portal can be found at www.odbs.knet.ca [5].

“In addition to online content that is linked from the ODBS portal, we have also embarked on an examination of reading needs and preferences of various KO members,” Caidi said. “Our aim is to assist community members in identifying content that would appeal to them, based on various target populations (children, youth, adults, etc.).

In addition, book titles have been sent to three communities and more funding for content is coming.”

KORI research director Brian Walmark said the project will increase the number of books available for primary school students and improve their literacy rates.

“We download copyright-free books, we print them off and distribute them to First Nations schools in KO communities,” Walmark said, explaining they print copies of the books on a high-speed colour copier and bind them on a book binder.

“We’re going to try every week or so to send a few more books up to kids up north.”

Walmark said one printer and book binder has already been delivered to Keewaywin and two other printers and book binders will be sent later this summer to Fort Severn and another KO community.

“In the meantime we are going to try to create as big a library of elementary school books as we can,” Walmark said.

Once community members realize the variety of books that can be created with this technology, Walmark said he foresees teenagers, adults and Elders asking for the latest books available through the project.

“They will be able to search out the title and then print it off and bind it and take it home,” Walmark said.

Caidi said the sky is the limit.

“The idea is to have a one-stop shopping when it comes to reading needs,” she said. “The key element is the importance of reading in one’s life and how we can support it.”

Caidi said future plans include the development of the ODBS portal into a virtual space where students and anyone in the northern communities can access and meet people such as Drew Hayden Taylor, ask questions and be inspired.

Hayden Taylor was a guest speaker during the online workshop March 29. He talked about his reading experiences while growing up in Curve Lake First Nation.

“He shared his impressions with the audiences about the importance of books and of reading as a practice,” said Caidi. “He also reflected on being a First Nation writer, and that there were not many role models out there for him. He also pointed out the lack of inventive, joyous literature coming out of Aboriginal writing circles but how that was changing.”

Hayden Taylor also spoke about the development of an edited volume of essays exploring Aboriginal writers’ take on science fiction during his hour-long presentation.

Please Recycle 

Source URL: <http://wawataynews.ca/node/19757>

Links:

[1] <http://www.wawataynews.ca/epublish/1>

[2] <http://www.wawataynews.ca/epublish/1/687>

[3] http://www.wawataynews.ca/archive/all/2010/4/29/Weagamow-Traditional-Days-gathering_19758

[4] http://www.wawataynews.ca/archive/all/2010/4/29/KO-printing-books-for-youth_19756

[5] <http://www.odbs.knet.ca>