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The Role of Teacher Education in Decolonizing Education in Canada's North: A Yukon Teacher Education Case Study

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Abstract

Similar to several other jurisdictions across the arctic, recent developments in Canada's Yukon Territory draw attention to how political developments have potential for accelerating changes in education that are responsive to Indigenous Peoples' cultural knowledge systems and practices. In support of this development, the sole teacher education provider in the Yukon, the Yukon Native Teacher Education Program (YNTEP), has a mandate to contribute to the realisation of these changes. In this paper, using a case study approach, we describe the philosophical intent and corresponding pedagogical and structural features of this program that seeks to support this realization. Further, accounts from a variety of YNTEP stakeholders, including present YNTEP pre-service teachers and graduates now employed as teachers and principals across the arctic, provided accounts of their experiences in enacting this imperative in their current roles. These accounts provided some evidence and evaluation of the efficacy of the role of teacher education in contributing to the decolonization of education in Canada's north. Finally, implications of this research for teacher education providers seeking to support such efforts are considered.

Key Words: Teacher Education; Decolonising; Critical Pedagogy; Curriculum Change

Introduction

Developments across Canada's three northern territories in the past two decades draw attention to how political changes have potential for accelerating and, potentially, demanding changes in education that are responsive to Indigenous Peoples' cultural knowledge systems and practices (Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, McMillan & Renaud, 2013). For example, the establishment of the territory of Nunavut in 1999 emanated from a deep-rooted and overwhelming call through years of lobbying to the government of Canada by Inuit to move towards self-governance in all aspects of Inuit society (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2007). In no context was there greater resonance of voice for self-determination than in the domain of education. With the establishment of Nunavut, as a result of separation from the North-West Territories, the new territory faces the challenge of reversing perennial assimilation practice and regaining a sense of identity, especially through the school and classroom experiences that influence the education of Inuit children.

Similarly, in the Yukon Territory, where this study is located, over the past three decades the governments of both Canada and the Yukon have moved towards actualizing policy developments with Yukon First Nations (YFNs), called Self-Government Agreements (SGAs). SGAs, which in the Canadian context are unique to the Yukon, are complex and wide-ranging, and include financial compensation, land, harvesting rights, heritage resources and operative governance structures in areas like education and justice (Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, McMillan & Renaud, 2014). The SGAs have come to finalization within the last decade and set out the powers of the First Nation government to, if it so decides, govern itself, its citizens and its land. Self-government agreements, unlikely unparalleled in colonized countries, provide Self-governing First Nations with law-making authority in specific areas of First Nation jurisdiction, including education. Within each SGFN considerable attention is given to inclusion of principles that acknowledge the traditional decision-making institutions of YFNs and ensure that these are integrated into institutional practices within contemporary forms of government (Lewthwaite, Owen & Doiron, 2015). Because of this imperative, with the establishment of SGFNs, each YFN with the required co-operation of the current provider of all education programs, Yukon Education, faces the immediate challenge of reversing assimilation and regaining a sense of identity especially within the processes that influence the education of their children.

Typical of most Indigenous peoples across the circumpolar north, the Inuit, Inuvialuit, Metis and First Nations people of Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon have participated in a school system that has been drawn from the dominant culture, in their case southern Canadian school system models (Eastmure, 2018; Foster & Goddard, 2001; McGregor & McGregor, 2018). Because of this, 'school' processes contrast significantly with the traditional education processes of northern First Peoples. In brief, the structural and operational processes and pedagogical practices of schools have both intentionally and unintentionally

for more than a century denied the inclusion of those aspects of culture that have value and are important to their children (Bishop & Glynn, 1999, Eastmure, 2018).

The recent political changes promulgated in Canada's territories place an undisputable 'call for action' from teachers (Council for Yukon Indians, 1973). That is, the curriculum experience being anticipated for northern students is now expected and required to be radically different from what has been perpetuated over the past century (Foster & Goddard, 2001), placing a particular challenge on curriculum development bodies and, especially, teacher education programs expected to serve this change. In this paper, we draw accounts from various stakeholders associated with the Yukon's only teacher education program to understand how these current changes resonate with the aspirational goals of the program and how they are experienced by those associated with this program. We ask the question: how have the more recent political changes impacted on stakeholders in working towards a curriculum experience for students grounded in their cultural norms? In brief, how have they experienced these political changes?

Indigenizing Teacher Education in Canada's North

Three teacher education programs (TEPs) exist in Canada's north; one in each of the three northern territories: Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. The programs were created over twenty years ago, similar to TEPs across Canada and other nations, to serve Indigenous teacher candidates and increase the representation of Indigenous teachers across the north with explicit anti-assimilationist attention to curriculum content and processes responsive to its citizens (Eastmure, 2018; McGregor & McGregor, 2018).

Speaking specifically to Yukon's context, a document compiled by the First Nations of the Yukon, 'Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow' presented a critique of public education from a Yukon First Nations' perspective (Council for Yukon Indians, 1973). The document attributed the historical marginalization of indigenous students within Yukon schools as a product of ongoing colonial violence; characterized by curricular irrelevancy and the feeling of alienation of indigenous students and parents in Yukon schools (Council for Yukon Indians, 1973). In a profound way, this analysis affirmed that schooling is deeply political, with some groups having the power to declare their knowledge, values and histories while others are marginalized (Haig-Brown, 1995). Born of this critique, the Yukon Native Teacher Education program was initiated more than a decade later to offer a decolonizing framework through which future teachers can develop a pedagogical approach that reclaims and affirms that Yukon First Nation educational outcomes.

Similar to the other northern Canadian TEPs, YNTEP initially only accepted students of First Nations ancestry but has expanded its role over the past decade, which has been represented by decisions to declare admission to non-Indigenous students. The program is small relative to other programs and on average graduates ten students, most of whom enter teaching positions in the Yukon, and typically at the elementary level (Kindergarten - Grade7). Most of the Yukon's 32 schools are represented by YNTEP graduates, and in only the exceptional case are the majority of the Yukon's teaching staff or principals YNTEP graduates. Many YNTEP graduates are employed outside of schools in educational roles, for example as policy developers or educational directors for Yukon First Nations.

It is not surprising that because of its conceptual mandate that YNTEP, and its graduates, have been since its inception "deeply connected to the colonial history of public schools in the Yukon by making clear the impacts of this history, and the relevance it has to today's schools" (Eastmure, 2018, p. 238). It seeks to elaborate approaches to teaching that are antithetical to hegemonic neocolonial interests and therefore, at times in direct tension with the practical professional requirements in contemporary schools. To cultivate this kind of professional agency/teacher leadership, YNTEP organizes its curricular experience within the paradigm of critical pedagogy, namely seeking to facilitate a 'conscientisation' amongst teacher candidates (Freire, 1970, 1988).

The curricular experience within YNTEP privileges the perspective of Yukon First Nation elders and community members in both general educational and curriculum courses. These narratives as an authoritative voice are put into dialogue with teacher candidates' own experience of schooling. Students explore through this voice the historical trajectory of educational policy and the impact of policy from a deeply personal indigenous perspective. It is our experience that this dialogical process produces emotional tension, exacerbated during students' initial school-based practicum. We anticipate that many students will experience a profound disconnect between the values espoused as foundational within their teacher education program (namely a commitment to decolonization and indigenization) and what they commonly observe as the perpetuating, unquestioned and unchallenged day to day practice within the Yukon's classrooms. Implicit in this process, is the hope that this tension/disequilibrium for teacher candidates translates into an ingrained criticality, fostering an ability for teacher candidates to analyse the contexts in which they operate, with attention to the ways in which students are marginalized and how this can be negotiated on behalf of students. This criticality is expected to be enacted on practicum and subject-embedded field-based experiences, including a concluding 16-week internship in the final year of the program. While many professional undergraduate programs may fulfill a socializing function within the educational space, it seems the TEP's across Canada's north have a particular mandate to cultivate disequilibrium within their teacher candidates and foster a social reconstruction orientation (Eisner, 1984). The fundamental marker of effectiveness of such

teacher education programs is then, the degree to which graduates are able to utilize this tension/disequilibrium to enunciate different ways of being a teacher and enacting curriculum experiences for students in response to students' cultural norms. In short, graduates are being positioned as 'teacher leaders' who are able to utilize a critical understanding of Canada's perpetuating colonial context to elaborate creative, empowering and perhaps subversive ways of 'being teacher'.

As asserted by Crowther (2002), central to the construct of teacher leadership is a critical awareness of existing barriers and one's position in working both within and with the existing structures and personnel to bring about change, and if necessary confronting through appropriate means barriers that resist the realization of aspired goals. This necessitates an ability in teachers to negotiate the institutional violence inherent in schools and continuously adjust their practice to effectively meet the needs of Indigenous students. Although programs have these aspirations for practice, we ask: how do graduates and other YNTEP stakeholders perceive recent political changes have impacted on their efforts to achieve such ends?

Theoretical Position

The study is grounded in the paradigm of critical pedagogy, which is likely essential to understanding processes that might drive or thwart political change and, correspondingly, change in the curriculum experience provided for northern students. Critical pedagogy is defined as an educational movement to help develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect this knowledge as a foundation for taking constructive action for change (Giroux, 2010). The primary intent of the political changes across Canada's north, including the Yukon, are a response to a critical awareness of the injustice of social orders, including education, that have historically and, unquestionably, continue to this day disenfranchise YFNs and this study's case, the broad curriculum experience provided influencing student learning. In response, critical pedagogy re-examines and, ultimately assists in the re-construction of educational practices in order to work towards a social order based upon a reconceptualization of what can and should be. Most evident within the critical theory writing is the emphasis on the idea of a growing 'consciousness' of one's condition amongst individuals, a 'conscientisation' as Freire (1970, 1988) refers, as the first step to constructive action in an educational practice of consequence for students.

Methodology

The methodology used in this research inquiry is the case study. The study endeavours to understand and explain a phenomenon: how political changes have impacted on

stakeholders in working towards a curriculum experience for students grounded in their cultural norms. The study strives towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action influencing curriculum enactment within a social system (Sjoberg, Williams, Vaughan, & Sjoberg, 1991), a northern territory and its current educational practice within the context of recent political changes. The unit of analysis in this case study are some of the players in this community: YNTEP current pre-service teachers and graduates who may currently be community citizens (including its parents) and First Nations administrators, including education managers and educational policy directors; Yukon Education employees including principals and teachers; and teacher educators, all of whom include both First Nations and non-First Nations citizens. Drawing upon multiple sources of information, including historical textual accounts of YNTEP (Eastmure, 2018) and participant experiences, the researchers sought to make sense of the respondents' personal stories pertaining to the research question and the ways in which these stories intersect in order to collaboratively construct a meaningful reality (Creswell, 2012).

We engaged with historical text (Eastmure, 2018) and stakeholders, both past and current YNTEP graduates and pre-service teachers, respectively, in order to more broadly consider their experiences pedagogically over the past ten years as a result of the more recent political changes. The research involved extensive interviews with the stakeholders previously identified. In all, 22 interviews were conducted seeking stakeholder views on the changes that had occurred since self-governance, especially with regards to their experiences in working towards an adjustment to the curriculum experiences offered to students. The participants were purposively selected to draw participation from YNTEP current and graduate students serving in variety of capacities in a variety of communities. The interviews were primarily unstructured conversations around the central research question. How have you experienced the recent political changes? How have these policy developments impacted on you professionally? Further extension of this question sought to understand what processes have led to change or thwarted the realization of aspirations manifest in the recent political assertions. It is noteworthy, that no questions focused through the conversation on YNTEP and whether initial teacher education had any role in their experiences with the political changes. Thus, the study provided an opportunity to evaluate the efficacy of YNTEP and its mandate to prepare graduate teachers for emancipatory action (Giroux, 2010).

In all, the interviews averaged in length from 30 minutes to two hours. The conversations were transcribed and verified as accurate by the participants. As well, they were asked to adjust any aspects of the interviews in order to better illustrate the points they sought to convey. The transcriptions were then analysed inductively around the focus of the research, especially around influences on change and tensions associated with change. Text was colour-coded to represent aspects associated with the research question with attention to the influence of recent political changes and participants' current roles.

This procedure corresponded with the analytical approach endorsed in empirical phenomenology which assumes a structure exists in the shared experiences of a phenomenon, and, by so doing, the methodology, including analysis, would seek to reveal the structure of each commentary and its essential constituents (Moustakas, 1994).

Results

Drawing from the inductive analysis of the interviews six common themes were identified across all participants. We emphasize at this stage of the paper that these were common to all. In the section that follows we address each of these themes drawing from two representative quotes for each.

Theme One: *Consciousness of Condition*

Common across all participants was awareness of the colonized nature of northern education and the potential of a variety of policy changes that have potential for disrupting educational practice, at a variety of levels including the classroom level.

The advocacy with [a particular jurisdiction] is for culture-based education. It is clear in all of the documentation, and it has been for quite a while [inferring more than a decade]. When I came here [as a principal] there was frustration [by the community] for the school to better reflect what was important. (Principal-YNTEP graduate, 2005).

When I transferred [to this community and this school] it was clear things were expected to be different. The community wanted these things to change with more focus on addressing the interests and - I think - the rights of [the First Nation]. I was asked about this in the interview [my awareness of the SGA and its ramifications]. I always keep that in mind and I know what is expected of me, even though it might not be talked about. (Teacher - YNTEP graduate, 2011).

Stakeholders recognized that change was sought and necessary, and this change was motivated by external influences on the school and how it needed to function in serving the intent of policy changes. This recognition gave evidence of participants' recognition of existing authoritarian tendencies and identified that this awareness of such a tendency was a foundation for taking constructive action (Giroux, 2010).

Theme Two: *Consciousness That Conditions Are Necessary for Change*

Participants voiced an awareness of what was necessary for disrupting educational practice, at a variety of levels including the classroom level.

There is a need for change and it won't happen immediately. It requires effort at a variety of levels to bring about that change. It's a collective effort by each teacher working with their colleagues and the community to make the change. But it has to be with a mind-set. We see progress and when we see progress it's always because of changes [in teachers or administration]. (Teacher – YNTEP graduate, 2011).

As a [pre-service teacher], you want to be in a school where what is being required is actually being addressed. In my first day in this community I was taken back about how clear the First Nation was about its future. It has a vision of what it wants to see happen in education and I am here to be a part of that solution. I see that as why I am here. I may be seeking some of my own personal and professional goals, but it was clear I am working with this First Nation. (Pre-service Teacher).

Participants recognized that policy changes were a likely necessary pre-cursor for change, but policy in itself did not create change (Lewthwaite et al., 2015; Yukon First Nations Advisory Council, 2008). Evident within the commentary was expressed identification of a 'climate of readiness' (Fullan, 1992) derived, primarily from a conscious awareness of the need for change influenced primarily by the increased information and dialogue amongst educators associated with the current policy endorsements, Participants indicated that in most contexts, especially those in rural contexts, that a shift in discourse was providing evidence of anticipation of readiness – and maybe, but less-so, ambivalence or even resistance - for change.

Theme Three: *Consciousness of Conditions Causing or Thwarting Change*

Extending awareness of the need for change and requirements for change, participants identified a variety of system elements contributing to or thwarting change.

I spent a year teaching in [a city] where there was no mention of addressing what is required of us. It was disturbing that it wasn't on anyone's radar and was never a topic of conversation. Here [in my current school and community] it is a big part of the conversation. So much of it has to do with the positive relationship we have with the First Nation and the number of people [both in the community and within the school] that are committed to this. It is a priority, but along with that you are supported. (Teacher – YNTEP graduate, 2001).

There doesn't seem to be ever anyone taking the lead for change and it doesn't get the priority it deserves. My daughter has been in two [city] schools and now is in Grade 7 and there has been just crumbs of attention to what now is required for teachers. I think the new curriculum [we are expected to follow from British Columbia] might give some 'kick' but I am not so confident. There's been a resistance to change

for years. That may be harsh, but as a teacher I know you can only use the excuse "I need help and support" for so long. You just need to believe it's important and get on with it (Parent and Policy Analyst – YNTEP graduate, 2001).

Participant comments from a variety of positions held provided a comprehensive awareness of contributors and constraints to the perceived anticipated change. Central to this awareness was the multi-system factor influences necessary for the realization of change, factors commonly cited in the literature (Lewthwaite, 2007; Fullan, 2002). Important to this context was the identification of multiple policy recommendations over several years that have provided an endorsement and even expectation for change. Although a variety of influences, both personal and environmental may be influencing change, the latter comment demonstrates understanding of the influence of perpetuating beliefs and practices that may continue to subordinate the aspirations under a more dominant and unprovoked perpetuating system of operation (Battiste and Henderson, 2000).

Theme Four: *Consciousness of Condition and One's Place in It*

Commonly expressed by participants was a conviction about their role in seeing the realization of the more recent policy endorsements coupled with a critical awareness of the influences that possibly thwarts such realization. Extending this, participants, without prompting, expressed indication of their role in supporting this outcome.

Ultimately the change that was going to occur was going to be based upon whether I was going to be a driver for change. I knew what the outcome needed to be. The community had to see this as their school and that they were a part of deciding what the school would do differently in so many ways. [As the principal] I had to be the driver for change by drawing people together for that change. (Principal - YNTEP graduate, 2005).

I know what is expected of me [in regards to the policy changes]. I don't need to look for directions from anyone else. So, for me, it's just about doing what I know is in the best interests of my students. I want them to be successful and their parents want them to be successful. Not just in school but in life. Basically, the school is working better and making sure school prepares our children for life, in its broadest sense. (Teacher – YNTEP graduate, 2011).

Evident within participant comments was evidence of the characteristics of teacher leaders as espoused by Crowther (2007). Central to the construct of teacher leadership is a critical awareness of existing barriers and one's position in working both within and with the existing structures and personnel to bring about change, and if necessary confronting through appropriate means barriers that resist the realization of aspired goals.

Theme Five: *Consciousness of Condition and Optimism for a Better Future*

Extending Crowther's considerations were participant's awareness of the need for change that ultimately would result in a better future for northern Canadian students, with attention to its First Peoples.

At the heart of what you do [as a teacher] is work towards what you know is right – actually what is just. The [education] system has to finally listen and respond [to what our First Nations are demanding in the SGAs]. I am a part of this and I uphold the need for that change. That's what I signed up for and I was challenged to do so. I entered YNTEP to become a teacher and along the way I came to understand my becoming a teacher was not just about me. This community makes it clear I have a responsibility here. (Teacher – YNTEP graduate, 2011).

Fundamentally YNTEP is no longer just about placing more First Nations teachers in classrooms. It's vital that our graduates understand how education functions, and, maybe more critically, dysfunctions. The formal educational experience of all Yukon students must change. Teachers and administrators need to be able to critically examine their practice and make changes so that the schooling experience for students is no longer just for a privileged few. (Faculty Advisor – YNTEP 2017).

Crowther (2007) affirms that teacher leaders see the promise and possibility of a 'brighter future' who facilitate successful communities of learning for all students. With their students they strive for pedagogical excellence, nurturing a culture of success at the level of operation to which they are located – whether a teacher, administrator or community member. With this conviction of a brighter future, they confront barriers in the school's culture and structures, and demonstrate through their actions and communication an aspiration for what is to be realized.

Theme Six: *Consciousness of Condition and the Realization of Tensions Associated with Seeing Intentions Realized*

Finally, evident within all participant commentaries were the tensions experienced in negotiating the institutional violence inherent in schools and adjusting their action and practice to effectively meet the needs of Indigenous students where and how they best believed they were so able.

I came into teaching because I could make change for children in my community. I felt I achieved this. I then became a principal because I wanted to influence other teachers so we could begin to bring about change in our community. We have made real progress. I have been asked many times to be the superintendent [14 northern

schools in nine communities] *and I know that this is beyond my reach to change. There is considerable resistance to change and I know what it is possible.* (Principal - YNTEP graduate, 2005).

There are many times [in staff meetings] I here resistance or – more like apathy - for what is necessary. It's hard to listen to because the changes have to happen and it's expected. I often think – come on - It's been a decade now [of self-governance]. You can't make the change happen. You can show your commitment to it [in your own practice] but living that out for a broader impact when there's resistance or apathy is a challenge. (Teacher – YNTEP graduate, 2011).

Participants commonly mentioned their experiences in what is referred to in the literature as 'tensionality'. Ted Aoki captures this premise when he states, “[a teacher’s] pedagogic position is a living in tensionality – a tensionality that emerges, in part, from the indwelling in a zone between two curriculum worlds: the worlds of curriculum-as-plan (intention) and curriculum-as-lived-experiences (reality).” (1987, p. 354). In our participants’ commentaries, living in the space between what they aspire for, in line with policy intensions, and what is experienced is, as Brookfield (1995) suggests, ‘the [place] for *deciding* which voices to listen to’. As affirmed by these participants they demonstrate making “a wise and prudent practical judgment about how to *act* in this situation” (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 190).

Discussion

Drawing from the analysis presented in the previous section, it is apparent that the current policy changes occurring in Canada’s Yukon and more likely across the north in regards to self-governance and the imperative to reverse the assimilationist ideology that has historically characterized northern education resonates with YNTEP stakeholder experiences within education. We recognize the limitation of drawing upon, although purposively selected participants from a variety of contexts, the 22 participants who are but approximate 130 graduates over its history. Because of this we are prudent in the assertions we make as we discuss the analysed data and themes recurrent throughout the commentaries.

In this discussion we draw attention to three key aspects that are important for us as teacher educators, and likely other teacher education providers across the colonized north, in evaluating the curriculum experience provided for pre-service teachers in YNTEP in their preparation for the political climate in which the majority will be professionally located.

First, we draw attention to the philosophy of YNTEP and how this resonates with current political changes in the Yukon, and, in extension, Canada’s north and graduate teacher experiences in this context. As stated earlier, YNTEP, similar to other northern TEPs, operates within a colonizing/decolonizing context where policy is provoking the transformation of schools (McGregor & McGregor, 2018). Not only does it operate within such a context, it

was initiated to function as a provocation of and promoter for this change. Without being asked to elucidate the influence of YNTEP on their current professional roles, stakeholders' commentaries indicate that this mandate resonates with participants' personal professional experiences. The themes identified provide evidence of participants' consciousness of educational and broader social condition, their place within this condition, and their recognition of influences on and tensions associated with aspired change.

Drawing from Aoki's construct of tensionality (1986), participant commentaries indicate an overt awareness of their indwelling in a zone between two curriculum worlds: the worlds of curriculum-as-plan (intention) and curriculum-as-lived-experiences (reality). Apparent within the participants is a critical awareness of the ongoing and, as evidenced, unquestioned orthodoxy of practice providing evidence of the hegemonic neocolonial interests perpetuating school and classroom practice (Fallon & Paquette, 2012). Evident in their commentaries is evidence of their ongoing tension with the conflicting intention of schools in the Yukon, and, correspondingly, their role in mediating this tension. Participants are aware of what political changes are aspired for as embedded with the tenets of the SGAs in tension with the perpetuation of the orthodoxy of practice which has been characteristic of the Yukon's colonial history (Fallon & Paquette, 2012). Correspondingly, they demonstrate evidence of "deciding which voices to listen to" and making decisions "about how to act" for change in the contexts they are located (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 190).

Second, we draw attention to evidence within the commentary of how YNTEP stakeholders perceive their 'position' as educators, and potentially how they have been positioned, possibly because of their YNTEP experience, to respond to the political changes under operationalization across the north. Alcott (1988) refers to positionality as a description of one's own social position in relation to the people one is working with. Commentary provides evidence that YNTEP stakeholders perceive themselves as contributors to aspired change - and with varying degrees larger dependent on current role - and position themselves overtly as collaborators working with the endorsed policy changes, especially towards the SGA intent. Participants unequivocally see the promise and possibility of a 'brighter future' within the current climate of reform. They communicate and (we hope) hopefully live out through practice conviction of a brighter future by confronting barriers in the school's culture and structures (Crowther, 2007). This is evident in their commentary, without being asked overtly about YNTEP's contribution to their positioning.

Third, for us as teacher educators, the limitations of the data also highlight multiple topics for further consideration and future investigation. Beyond a vocational 'tensionality' for educators, the violence of colonization expressed in educational contexts continues to have very real and immediate material effects on Indigenous students (Alfred, 2005; Simpson 2008). A conversation around effective practice (with attention to its capacity to decolonize and indigenize) thus necessitates engagement with students and an analysis of the learning

environment. Freire writes, “teachers and students, co-intent on reality are both subjects, not only in the task of unveiling reality, thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge” (Freire, 1980, pg. 69). Thus, conscientisation is not a static achievement but an ongoing and dynamic process that effective teachers engage in with their colleagues, students and communities. If conscientisation is a purported professional competency for YNTEP graduates, future classroom practice (not simply commentary as presented in this study) becomes a future focal point for our analysis. This would include an investigation into YNTEP graduates' ongoing engagement with students, demonstrations of epistemological curiosity (seeking and participating in authentic dialogue on a number of levels) and ultimately a dynamic unity between theoretical engagement and practice (Freire, 1980).

Conclusion and Implications

We started this paper by drawing attention to the political and policy changes occurring across Canada's north as a result of the policy changes associated with northern First Peoples reclaiming some control of education and the experiences provided for its young citizens. Placed within this context, we described the role of teacher education in Canada's Yukon, which as Eastmure (2018) asserts, is to “redeem its history [of colonialism]” (p. 238). We have drawn accounts from various stakeholders associated with the Yukon's teacher education program to understand how they experience these current changes with no specific questions asked specifically about YNTEP's contribution to how they experience these changes. We asked the question: how have the more political changes impacted on stakeholders in working towards a curriculum experience for students grounded in their cultural norms? It is evident from the commentaries expressed that despite the variability in participant's context's response to the aspired for political changes, there is a pronounced and perpetuating ‘conscientisation’, as Freire (1970, 1988) asserts, amongst participants. Commentaries indicate this serves as a critical foundation for seeing the need for constructive action for responding to the aspired imperatives. Stakeholders recognize the need for change and are challenging of the purpose and processes of schooling.

As Friere (1997) asserts, “they perceive the reality critically... and [this appears to] become the motivating force for liberating action” (p. 34). In saying this, we are mindful that our participants serve in a variety of roles and with varying fields of influence. Some refer to action at a personal level, which becomes manifest at the classroom level. Others envisage their role at a collective level, to the point of mobilizing the community and the school's staff towards change at the school community level (Lewthwaite, 2007). Despite this possibility we are not ignoring the difficulty of the challenge facing education in Canada's north and our teacher education program in contributing to these changes. As evident in the commentary of our participants, there is a voiced congruence between the current educational change

aspired and the philosophical premise of the program, although this specific investigation of congruence was not explicitly explored.

The question is, are graduates prepared to lead for change as evidenced in their practice? In our data presentation we limited the data to common themes; those aspects common to all, which is primarily demonstrated in their critical awareness of condition. Not consistent amongst our participants were practical indicators of how they lead for change, whether at the classroom, school or community level. Despite this, indicators are that Canada's TEPs likely play a significant role in the efforts to see the realization of the self-governing agreements across Canada's north and decolonized formal educational settings, as they ascribe to principles of 'critical' practice, some of which are likely exemplified in YNTEP's intent. Potentially, northern TEP's need to provide clear representation during their programs as to how leading for change is operationalized in colonized settings.

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