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Educational Change and Self-Governance
in a Yukon First Nation Community

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Abstract

More recent developments in Canada's Yukon Territory draw attention to how political changes have potential for accelerating practices in education that are responsive to Indigenous Peoples' cultural knowledge systems and practices. In this study, through the use of case study methodology, an account of the changes that have occurred in one First Nation are presented. Further, the study seeks to identify the processes influencing the change and the influences of these changes on teachers' teaching and students' learning. Finally, tensions at the classroom, school and community level arising from these changes and anticipated changes are described.

Introduction

More recent developments in Canada's Yukon Territory draw attention to how political changes have potential for accelerating practices in education that are responsive to Indigenous Peoples' cultural knowledge systems and practices. In contrast to other provincial jurisdictions across Canada, treaties were historically never negotiated in the Yukon. 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) The journey towards this end is well documented in the Canadian literature (for example, Fallon and Paquette, 2012). 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. The SGAs have come to finalization within the last decade and set out the powers of the First Nation government to govern itself, its citizens and its land. Self-government agreements provide Self-governing First Nations (SGFNs) with law-making authority in specific areas of First Nation jurisdiction, including education.

Within each SGFN considerable attention is given to the inclusion of principles that acknowledge the traditional decision-making institutions of YFNs and ensure that these have the potential to be integrated into institutional practices within contemporary forms of government (Authors, 1998). Because of this imperative, with the establishment of SGFNs, each YFN with the required co-operation of Yukon Education (YE) faces the challenge of engaging in decolonizing processes which focus on reversing assimilation and, by so doing, regaining a sense of identity through the processes that underpin the education of their young citizens (Smith, 1997). Typical of most Aboriginal peoples, YFNs have until most recently participated in a school system that has been drawn from the dominant culture, in their case southern Canadian school system models (Foster & Goddard, 2001; Lewthwaite et al., 2014). Because of this, school processes and practices such as decision-making in regards to the teacher and principal recruitment and selection, professional development for facilitating teacher cultural competence, content of curricula, and pedagogical practices have both intentionally and unintentionally for more than a century denied the inclusion of those aspects of [YFN] culture that have value and are important to [YFN] children (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

Within this paper we seek to investigate the processes at work that seek change to the curriculum experience provided for citizens within a Yukon First Nation with the advent of self-governing agreements. Specifically, we ask what processes have influenced, negatively or positively curriculum change; that is the broad learning experience provided for students grounded in the FNs aspirations for education? What tensions exist as a result of a change in governance agreements in regards to curriculum change? The study described in this paper addresses these questions.

Context of the Study:
Self-governance for Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in

For Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation (THFN) in Dawson City, Yukon the establishment of their specific SGA in 1998 has brought with it significant opportunity for educational change. First Nation citizens in Dawson comprise 39% of the total community population of 2002 (Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2014), consistent with the 37% of the total local Kindergarten through to Grade 12 in the lone community school population of 224. Negotiations between THFN and the Governments of both Canada and the Yukon resulted in the inclusion of a general jurisdictional governance statement within the SGA, article 17.1, which provides for the "assumption of responsibility by the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in (TH) for the management, administration and delivery of any program or service within

the jurisdiction of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in" (Authors, p. 32). Within the broader scope of program delivery in general, article 17.1, is specific reference to education in sub-article 17.7, which specifically outlines the provision for education. Notwithstanding that the SGA provides potential for TH to work towards *autonomous* control of education, which could be entirely independent of Yukon Education, the SGA also makes explicit the provisions to be enacted if a *shared* delivery of education is decided upon by the First Nation [italics authors].

> In relation to education, upon the request of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and the Yukon shall during the term of a self-government financial transfer agreement, negotiate the division and sharing of responsibility for the design, delivery and administration of programs delivered within the Traditional Territory relating to:
>
> 17.7.1 Indian student counselling;
> 17.7.2 cross cultural teacher/administrator orientation;
> 17.7.2 composition of teaching staff
> 17.7.4 early childhood, special and adult education curriculum;
> 17.7.5 kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum;
> 17.7.6 the evaluation of teachers, administrators and other employees.
>
> (Authors, 1998, p. 33)

Inherent within this documentation is the explicit attention to the apparent autonomy THFN has in deciding on *how* education is administered and delivered, especially in relation to the school educational experience provided for its younger citizens. Correspondingly, the agreement draws attention in 17.7.1 through 17.7.6 to potential change to a variety of school operation aspects that broadly influence what can be regarded as 'curriculum'. As Ornstein and Hunkin's (2012) endorse, curriculum is more encompassing than the explicit or formal course of study, emphasizing simply content. They define curriculum much more broadly as, illustrated in the sub-articles above, the *totality of experiences* provided for learners, drawing into consideration not only *what* is learned, but also *how* it is learned, and from *whom* and, possibly most significantly at an epistemological level, *why* is it learned and *for what purpose*. It is this description of curriculum that informs this paper. Within their reference is the inference for curriculum as *possibility*, albeit that such possibility is largely influenced by a variety of imperatives because curriculum is socially constructed and enacted and open to contestation (Pinar, 2004).

Central to the enactment of this possibility is understanding the structure of self-governance in education and the potential tensions that can ensue in curriculum development and enactment as a result of this structure. As stated by Fallon and Paquette (2012, p. 12),

> [SGAs require] some kind of advisory structure at the local community in the form of guaranteed representation on local public-school boards. This integrated model was followed in turn by a delegated-authority model as the main mode of First-Nations control of education. This delegated-authority model authorized First-Nation communities to administer the laws and procedures for the education of First-Nation children on behalf of provincial authorities (provincial and territorial ministries of education). Within this model, the province or territory retains ultimate authority over laws, regulations, and policies setting forth education standards and criteria for academic success. By so doing, this structure represents a form *of neo-colonialism rather than it does [a structure for facilitating] decolonization* [italics authors].

The assumption of responsibility within the self-governing agreement is granted to the First Nation to decide in negotiation with Yukon Education how these SGA imperatives are operationalised. As stated by the TH SGA Implementation Director, there was provision for [TH's]

> own self-managed education system, its own separate education system in Dawson, was definitely what the TH citizens *did not want*. The TH see themselves as part of an integrated community, they don't want a separate education system. They wanted a united system, a merged system, essentially a marriage between the TH, the Government of Yukon, where each would be equal partners and in essence enter into a co-management system or even call it co-governance when it comes to education (Tim Gerberding, Implementation Director, personal communication)

Although the SGA provides TH with the policy space to create self-contained FN education systems, TH have instead chosen to use this authority to create a merged integrated system. For TH, the SGA implementation has seen the establishment of the THFN Educational Council headed by an Education Manager which co-directs curriculum development, in its broadest form with the school principal. The Council has, amongst other things, created the positions of an elementary and secondary Community Education Liaison Coordinator (CELC) who are located in the school and act as support for teachers in curriculum development and delivery, in its broadest form and especially at is narrower form

at the classroom level. This often involves assisting in identifying TH Elders and Heritage workers who might, for example, work with teachers to broaden the curriculum experience for students or providing in-service training on culturally responsive pedagogical practice.

As Fallon and Paquette imply, this co-governance system becomes, quite likely, problematic because, as commonly identified in the literature, school operations and education in general within colonized Indigenous contexts, largely marginalize and subordinate any aspirations for education that might be sought by the Indigenous communities (Battiste and Henderson, 2000). As asserted by McKinley (2000), school processes and practices such as decision-making in regards to the content, pedagogical practices and language of instruction of curriculum have both intentionally and unintentionally denied the inclusion of those aspects of [YFN] culture that have value and are important to [YFN] children. McKinley (2000) argues that curriculum, the totality of experience provided for learners, is largely an expression of the dominant culture because the intention of curriculum is not adequately grounded in the priorities and epistemologies of Indigenous communities and, as identified, typically remains unchallenged and perpetuates, even when provision is made for self-governance (Wood and Lewthwaite, 2008). The development of SGAs quite obviously draws attention to the potential and likely incongruence between the intentions and aspirations of the dominant nation-state and the emergent First Nation. It is within this space that tensions between decolonization and neocolonialism are likely to be evidenced.

It is not surprising that the critique of self-governance agreements in Canada draws attention to the tensions and dilemmas likely to be experienced in curriculum development and enactment in such contexts because, as Fallon and Paquette (2012) assert, self-governance is but a *form* of governance "likely disguised as neo-colonialism; that is, a system in which colonial power can still unwittingly undermine or negate Indigenous educational patterns, many of which are linked to cultural norms and values" (Ngyuen et al. 2009).. Thus, in this paper we explore what contributes to change towards First Nation aspirations being realised in curriculum, especially when hegemonic influence (Gramsci, 1997) is likely deeply entrenched within the operation of education broadly and in schools and classrooms specifically. With the recent transition to self-governance, what processes have influenced, negatively or positively curriculum change; that is the broad learning experience provided for students? What tensions exist as a result of a change in governance agreements in regards to curriculum change in

accordance with the tenor of the SGA? The study described in this paper addresses these questions.

Methods

Methodology

The methodology used in this research inquiry is the case study. Using multiple sources of data the study endeavours to understand and explain a phenomenon; the processes influencing educational development that responds to the aspirations of the assertions of a SGA, in this study's case, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in SGA (1998). The study strives towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action influencing curriculum development within a social system, a school community (Sjoberg, Williams, Vaughan, & Sjoberg, 1991). The unit of analysis in this case study is the dominant players in the school community: the TH citizens (including its Elders; Chief and Council; administrators, including Education Manager; Heritage Department members and Community Education Liaison Coordinators (CELCs), and Yukon Education employees including superintendent, principal and teachers, the latter of which includes both TH and non-TH citizens and, finally, school community members including TH and non-TH students and parents. Drawing upon multiple sources of information, this case study includes a multi-perspective analysis drawing themes from these relevant players and the interaction among them. Overall, the researchers sought to make sense of the respondents' personal stories pertaining to school development and the ways in which these stories intersect and ensuring dialog between the researchers and those with respondents in order to collaboratively construct a meaningful reality (Creswell, 2012). The authors sought to understand behaviour from the respondents own frame of reference accepting that there were multiple ways of interpreting experiences (Denzin, 2009) but expecting that within these experiences common themes would be identified.

Theoretical Position

Urie Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory, a theory that has only recently been applied to community-based educational development (see, for example, Lewthwaite et al., 2005, 2008, 2014), is used as the primary theoretical frame to identify and understand the processes influencing the developmental processes associated with curriculum development in response to the SGA aspirations. Within his bio-ecological theory, *development* is defined as the phenomenon of continuity and change in the bio-psychological characteristics of

human beings *both* as individuals and as groups. Of importance to this study, Bronfenbrenner described development as the sustained, progressively more complex interaction with and activity in the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). These descriptions of development are central to this study because if a school community in its curriculum enactment is indeed developing in accordance with the SGA intent, there should be evidence of progressively more complex interaction with and activity, both at the individual and group level, in the aspects that provide for the broader curriculum experience for its citizens consistent with this intent.

For Bronfenbrenner, the ecological environment, unique to each individual's situation, is seen as a series of nested and interconnected structures, ranging from the individual through to the macrosystem, which includes the much broader cultural and political systems in which the individual or group is located (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The innermost structure includes the individuals central to the process under consideration, within this study's case, the primary players at the school level charged with *enacting curriculum*, teachers, students, Elders, and CLECs and less directly, principal, parents (both both TH and non-TH) and the TH Heritage Department and Education Manager. Bronfenbrenner suggests that individuals possess developmentally instigative or personal attribute characteristics that invite, inhibit, or prevent engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with and activity in the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, p. 97). Within the context of this study, as inferred by Fullan (1993), a teacher's receptivity to curricular adjustment in line with TH curriculum aspiration and her competence in enacting such is likely to be a developmentally instigative personal attribute that influences curriculum development in accordance with THFN aspiration. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner suggested that the most proximal and significant sphere or setting is the individual's microsystem: the pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given *face-to-face* setting with particular material and physical features and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics, personalities, and systems of belief (Bronfenbrenner, p. 148). Within the context of this study, which focuses on the broader curriculum experience provided for students, the strengths of the relationships, collaborative capabilities, and the resourcing and leadership provided, as evidenced in other educational contexts (Lewthwaite, 2007; Lewthwaite et al., 2010) are likely critical aspects influencing such development. His model, most importantly, attempts to underscore processes and the *dynamics* of these processes that might influence development. His model emphasizes, especially, *proximal* processes usually within an individual's microsystem: those patterns of activation that drive or thwart stability and change. Proximal processes, according to Bronfenbrenner,

allow for the active engagement of the individual, occur often and are stable over time, and provide for increasingly more complex interactions.

In the context this study, this construct has obvious applicability. It becomes important for the key players be actively involved in a pattern of activity that mobilizes and sustains attention, develops knowledge, and encourages the individual, and group, to attain slightly higher levels of functioning (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The effectiveness of these proximal processes appears to be at the very heart of what contributes to development. Thus, one can suppose that there can be high- and low-level proximal processes. The frequency and intensity of the manifestation of a proximal process and whether it invites, inhibits, or prevents engagement in more complex interactions is likely to influence development both of the individual and the group.

Supporting Bronfenbrenner's theoretical frame is a further paradigm, critical pedagogy, which is likely essential to understanding processes that might drive or thwart change post-SGA introduction. 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 (Giroux, 2010). The primary intent of the YFN SGAs is a response to a critical awareness of the injustice of existing social orders, including education, that have historically and, arguably, continue to this day disenfranchise YFNs and this study's case, the curriculum influencing student learning. In response, critical theory, similar to the underlying premise of the SGAs, re-examines and, ultimately assists in the re-construction of 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. It is this growing 'consciousness' that the authors would like to emphasize as important to the research presented herewith and, we feel, is most evident in the conversational data presented in this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study presented here focused on a three-stage data collection process, aspects of the first two stages which have been reported on earlier (Lewthwaite et al., 2013, 2014). In the first stage of the research, conducted in 2008 and 2009, the first researcher engaged with TH Elders, Chief and Council, Education Manager, teachers, parents, and high school students to elicit their aspirations for

education, especially in terms of the broader curriculum provided for students. Special attention was given to not only the *what* of curriculum, but also the *how* and *why*? Emanating from the discussion was an aspiration that the educational experiences provided should be reflected not only in the management and operation processes of the school but also in the curricula and programs implemented and pedagogies used in classrooms (Lewthwaite et al., 2014). Beyond this tangible manifestation of the explicit curriculum was an aspiration for the hidden curriculum (Eisner, 1979) to be epistemologically grounded in TH cultural values, a foundation identified as critical for First Nation student engagement in schools (Costagno & Brayboy, 2008). This consultation process resulted in a wide range of curriculum efforts, one being the development of a pedagogical framework for teaching and its application within newly developed curriculum resources, especially from Grades 4 through 7 in science education (Lewthwaite et al., 2014). The second phase of the data collection, starting in 2009 and still ongoing, has involved providing support to teachers to implement the pedagogical framework and to investigate the effect, both qualitatively and quantitatively, of such actions upon student learning and engagement (Authors). Stakeholder commentary, especially from teachers, student, Elders and TH parents, on this process, through recorded interviews during and after these interventions, has been instrumental in gaining an understanding of processes, both at the individual teacher and microsystem level, influencing, mostly positively, this process.

Paralleling this initiative, starting in 2003, have been a wide variety of formal perpetuating collaborative curriculum initiatives that have the intention of providing the broad curriculum experience for students from Kindergarten through Grade 12 aspired to by the TH community, but still operating with the broadly defined mandated explicit curriculum defined by Yukon Education. Examples of these developments have included, and are not limited to, the Grade 10 Social Studies curriculum focusing on TH culture and history. As well, TH citizens' traumatic experience with Residential School has been developed into an extensive curriculum component (Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, 2009) of Grade 11 Social Studies. Further, language instruction in Hän, the TH language, has been offered for the past eight years for students from Kindergarten to Grade 5. As well, traditional Culture Camps have been developed by TH Heritage and actioned over the past six years that focus on traditional rites of passage for TH youth. These camps include First Hunt, Moose Camp, and First Fish and are typically several days in length, involve participation of Elders and parents as well as both TH and non-TH students and are formally registered as curriculum offerings with Yukon Education. In the elementary grades CELCs work with classroom teachers and TH staff and citizens to incorporate Traditional

Knowledge field trips which are either daily outings or overnight camps. In association with the initiation of these formal curriculum initiatives, have been scores of more informal, what might be regarded as more opportunistic, initiatives. These have included Elder story-telling or assisted activities in the classroom; community visits; special assemblies; advocacy and well-being support for students; and a variety of strategies to improve parent-child-school liaison. Again, during these developments, over forty recorded interviews have documented participant, especially teacher, student, and parent comments on the curriculum changes and participant response to these changes.

Although the research on the broad curriculum changes and the influences of these changes have been under investigation since 2008 (Lewthwaite et al. 2013, 2014), more recently we engaged stakeholders in a final research stage in order to more broadly consider the curriculum changes that had occurred over the past seven years. This part of the research, conducted by the second author, involved extensive interviews with the stakeholders previously identified. In all, fifteen interviews were conducted seeking stakeholder views on the changes that had occurred since self-governance especially in regards to the curriculum experiences offered to students. The interviews were primarily unstructured conversations around the two research questions. What processes have lead to change in, or thwarted the realization of aspirations manifest in the SGA? And, what tensions do you see with curriculum change as a result of a change in governance agreements? 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 analyzed inductively around the focus of the research, especially around influences on change and tensions associated with change. An analytical grid was used to categorize themes identifying within the transcriptions. Each researcher coded four transcriptions ensuring that all researchers transcribed at least one transcription common to all to ensure consistency in the analytical process. Where there was discrepancy between and among researchers in the coded examples listed in the grid, consensus was achieved through negotiation. Finally, once all transcriptions had been analyzed, we aggregated all coded responses into one grid and sought to independently identify through a cross-participant analysis common themes under which the comments were aggregated. Again, once identified independently we sought consensus through negotiation to arrive at a list of general and major themes (Cresswell, 2012) associated with the research focus. This structured 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, sought to reveal the structure of each commentary and its essential constituents (Moustakas, 1994).

Results

In this section we draw upon the data collected over the research phases and subsequent analysis to respond to the two research questions. We provide excerpts of interviews (despite most participants request for extended narratives (Lewthwaite et al., 2014)) that correspond with each theme category to provide evidence for such claims and provide parsimonious attention to the underlying theoretical frames informing these responsesr. We do not mention names or titles in order to preserve the anonymity of participants.

Research Question 1: With the recent transition to self-governance, what processes have influenced, negatively or positively, curriculum change in accordance with the tenor of the SGA; that is the broad learning experience provided for students?

1. The changes in curriculum are seen to be of significant consequence for students and the community's future and are attributable to identifiable multi-system influences.

Although we have documented the evidence of change, especially in regards to teachers' teaching and the influence of this on student learning (Lewthwaite et al., 2013, 2014), stakeholders were able to identify influences on this change, most of which were attributable, primarily, to the proximal processes which were operative amongst stakeholders.

> I think it also helps with the understanding between the community and the school because one of the challenges that the school system faces is that we are a system, we are a bureaucracy, we are an institution, and many people do not have fond memories of their time in institutions like school. So we need to be finding ways to open those doors, to open lines of communication, to be able to work better together. And I think that this the key to the strategies that we've been using that have helped – doing it as a community. We still have a long ways to go but I think it's helped to break down some of the barriers and that it has helped families to be more understanding and responsive to be able to work together for the best interests of the students.

> It comes from doing this as a community. I think our students are more aware of who they are and there's more sense of pride and identity and I think identity is key because we're not limiting the education to just our students, our First Nation students, it's across the board. And I think that's

important, that's an important approach. All our camps, everything that we do is open to the community and not, of course our students, our children first, but it's important for their friends to know as well. And there is a great sense of pride in what is happening and who we are [as a FN].

2. Although the SGA has provided an impetus for change, it, in itself, has not created the change

Commonly evident within the commentary was attention to the macrosystem influence of the existent and emergent political system as a contributor to development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This primarily was voiced with reference to the explicit detail of the SGA:

> SGA was set up to provide for the assumption of responsibility for schooling by TH; that is, its own unique and self-managed school, education system, but they didn't want that. Instead they wanted a co-governance model but the wording in the SGA using words like 'shall' negotiate was inserted to ensure the Government of Yukon was *obligated* to negotiate matters in regard to education. This authoritative language served to elevate the position of the First Nation's imperatives.

As well, this was manifest in reference to the flexibility available through Yukon Education's explicit yet flexible curriculum requirements Yukon First Nation Education Advisor Committee (2008).

> Consistent with the tenor of SGAs to work towards education practice more responsive to the "culture-based education" has been more recently identified by YE and its Education Act as one of the foundational principles for school development in the Yukon. YE policy requires community schools to create, preserve, promote, and enhance their culture, including arts, heritage and language in classrooms. The flexibility with curriculum allows for this.

3. The changes that have occurred have occurred primarily because of a desire for change primarily as a response to awareness of the need for change rather than legislated imperatives

Dominating the commentary was the identification of a 'climate of readiness' (Fullan, 1992) derived, primarily from a conscious awareness of the need for change derived from a recognition of existing authoritarian tendencies, and acknowledgment that this knowledge was a foundation for taking constructive action (Giroux, 2010)

This power did not translate into immediate responsibility. There was an imperative for change, but that did not make it happen. It had to be an internal thing. A personal thing for those involved. We have offered programs before they were even sanctioned. [Now the inclusion of the Residential School experience is a national priority] but even before that we were doing it because our community wanted it to happen.

The energy and pride that was evident within TH for change [during and after SGA inception] was important. I think many could remember the days of the Dawson Indian Band and the lack of authority we had. The SGA provided that foundation we needed for moving towards governance. It provided the momentum we required. There was a really disheartening and unsettled time. It had to change and this opened the door for change.

4. The changes have involved considerable serendipity, especially in regards to the coming together of capabilities

Bronfenbrenner refers to the importance of time and people as central influences on development. Change in time of the individual and the group but also the conditions within the environment which the group operated provided a salutary effect on development (1994).

Soon after the SGA was signed there were some wanting immediate change and demanded it. That was not productive. We did not have the capability or capacity to make those changes. It rested on having the right personnel to bring this about. Oddly, those people have come sometimes with no calculation of the contribution they would make. It really has been about being optimistic about the possibilities for change and then working towards what is possible.

I think we have had a 'perfect storm' of events. We have really strong CELCs and teachers who are open to change and are willing to work with the CELCs. We have a principal that is open and flexible to the changes and willing to work with the community. We have a large capacity at the First Nation, with people that have the capability to work towards such change. Much of what has happened has occurred because of people who have had a long-term commitment to the town and have the skills and knowledge to contribute to change. There are strong relationships between TH and other community members. Many people who live here see a very positive future, built on that collaboration.

5. The changes have been facilitated especially by the counsel of Elders and the tenets of the SGA.

Commentary commonly identified that the process of development needed, not only collaboration but also, guidance. The social role of and interpersonal relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) with Elders was seen as a significant influence on the developmental trajectory of curriculum, in all aspects. As outlined in the SGA, It was their role and relationship that invited and permitted more complex interaction with in curriculum (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

> It has to be cautious. I have been told several times what I have done in my role with TH has been 'no good'. One of the big changes with the SGA is that our Elders now can serve as Elder, and we are growing to learn that relying on them for advice is absolutely vital.

> You would not have that outcome without that governance. But it's a supportive governance. We seek that advice, we need that advice. If you don't do it right, you'll be told, but you'll also be helped to do it better next time. The power dynamic has changed for me. I am now seek that advice.

6. The changes that have occurred for this community are not identified as possible for all communities

Participants commonly referred to how curriculum development was not only time, people and process dependent, it was also context dependent (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

> We are seeing things happen here that just simply are not even remotely realities in other [Yukon] communities.

> Although other Yukon communities are negotiating similar conditions in their SGAs, I am not convinced it is all possible. Our community has a stable population and many people [from outside the Yukon] want to build a life here, for their family. It draws many special people and many TH citizens have increasingly stronger educational backgrounds and what to serve and lead. Having that resource base is not as common in other communities. We are fortunate.

Apparent within these themes is evidence of the utility Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory in understanding the influences on curriculum development, in its broadest sense, in a Yukon FN, subsequent to the inception of a SGA. Clearly evident, as Bronfenbrenner asserts, is the influence of process, people, time and context on development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Similarly, a critical awareness of the perpetuating injustice of existing social order and the possibility associated with SGA inception were critical ingredients promoting curriculum change.

What tensions exist as a result of a change in governance agreements in regards to curriculum change?

1. The curriculum development that has occurred and is occurring is not palatable to all

Evident within the commentary was evidence of competing tensions, especially associated with the purpose of education.

> I think we have lost sight of what's worth learning in our world today and increasingly, as a rural community, we have always been challenged by parents to ensure we don't let things [curriculum] be too focused on matters outside of pure academics. I'll hear a parent say, I'm sending my kid to [city] because they'll get a better education there. Better to them means more academics. I can't see that a young person's development can be gained by just more academics. I think our focus is moving to acknowledge the importance of making sense of our natural world and our place in it. But it's not what everyone wants.

> And it creates a lot of problems for our parents because, you know, on the one hand, we want our children to have a good education, but on the other hand we also want our children to be immersed in our culture, and harvesting in the fall is an important part of our culture, it's a part of our food system and it's important that our future generations understand how to harvest and do it respectfully and spiritually right so. There has to be a balance. I don't want cultural inclusion to mean time way from core learning. If there is too much a shift to cultural inclusion [TH and non-TH] will be unhappy.

Both of these commentaries present a very thoughtful critique and a 'consciousness' of the tensions associated with the curriculum currently being provided in their community. Both question an orientation to education that is exclusively focused either on an academic rationalistic view of education (Eisner, 1979) or one, that as Kemmis (2012) suggests is, ultimately, about the formation of culturally-located persons who in turn become a part of the collectives of communities, societies and our shared world. This community (Lewthwaite et al, 2013) in the first phase of the study, identified that, historically, schooling *interfered with education* because the schools was suffocated by a dominating focus on curricula and assessments and students' achievement. Clearly, the commentaries above suggest seek close attention to a well-conceptualised prioritisation of both, but not at the expense of either.

2. The curriculum development necessary has not drawn attention to the fundamental changes some have sought

It is not surprising that evident within the commentary was suggestion that the fundamental, underpinning 'hidden' curriculum of the school had, potentially, not been disrupted and potentially the underlying curriculum of the school remained,

unconsciously or consciously, unadjusted. This was evident in two lines of commentary. As one might expect, some questioned whether a TH cultural epistemology was underpinning the curriculum development and, indeed, whether this it was possible and, questionably desirable. As suggested by Smith (1999), stakeholder's personal epistemology frames how we think about different ideas and practices in education.

> The changes are significant. But I wonder what is possible. Is just the activity of school [curriculum] enough? I don't think so. I think it has to be much deeper and consistent with what we [TH] see as of value and hold important. I don't think we can expect that of a school and teachers unless they have that initimate knowledge and appreciation themselves.

Further, commentary drew attention to perceptions of TH citizens, not TH culture, was still grounded in deficit-theorizing. Despite the positive developments in curriculum at the broadest level, apparent in the conversations, especially from those of a critical awareness of such theorizing, were comments associated with teachers' potential resistance conscious or conscious perpetuating beliefs which would likely manifest itself in practice, especially in classroom interactions and perceived views of learners. As Bishop et al. (2003) assert, at the heart of many school systems' thinking is a belief or, at least, an assumption that Western ways are superior and that Aboriginal culture and specifically students may bring deficits to classrooms, not assets. Such thinking suggests that not only are students' background experience and knowledge of limited importance to promote learning, but so are their cultural foundations. Deficit thinking or theorizing, as it is called, is the notion that students, especially minority students, fail in school because they and their families experience deficiencies such as limited intelligence or behaviours that obstruct learning (Castagno and Brayboy, 2008; Valencia, 1997).

> I think we are at an important stage [in our development]. There have been significant changes, but I wonder whether it has really challenged how school operates. What does it ultimately reward? I think there are still lots of [TH] kids that are leaving because they just don't have that academic bent or are seen to not fit with school I think what we promote still caters to a certain kind of student.

> I feel we have come a long way. But I wonder about what comes out the other end and who comes out the other end [upon graduation or in leaving school]. There *is* a lot of activity but has it really changed? I [as a parent] wonder what the conversations are about [amongst teachers, inferring some students are seen with deficits]. I am not sure that what we [as TH

citizens] see and seek is what everyone else sees and seeks. I think there can still be prejudice.

3. The effect of such change has yet to be realised in areas that are seen as important indicators for success

The initial phase of the research exposed the aspiration of the FN to see students walking confidently and capability in 'both' worlds (Lewthwaite et al., 2013, 2014). One of the imperatives in the initial phase of the research was towards such ends, but privileging academic foundations that were seen as the capital for future developmental success of both the individual and the FN

Ultimately, we need to see higher graduation rates, especially students leaving with strong academic qualifications and strong in literacy and numeracy. The numbers [of TH citizens] graduating is increasing, but I am not convinced the [academic] quality of the background has improved.

We see the future dependent on strong a grounding academically and culturally. That's how we build a better future. We see some [TH citizens] who go way and will contribute to that future [but that is a small number].

4. The practice and priority of teaching still situates teachers as authority

Evident within the commentary and extending from point one above, was the apparent perceived positioning of teachers as authority, able to decide on, as indicated in the introduction to this paper, on the what, how and why of education. Ultimately, teacher practice was corresponded to their beleifs (Pajares, 1992). As Alcoff (1988) suggests positionality describes one's own social position in relation to the people one is working with. Positionality commonly situates race, gender, class, and other socially significant identities as markers of our relational position, and is thus highly personal and contextual (Alcoff, 1988). Commentary provided evidence that the perception was that not all teachers position themselves overtly as collaborators working with the FN towards the SGA intent. This becomes evident in the commentary below.

There has to be a getting away from a certain kind of content and a certain way of getting the content across. There has to be that consideration that things can be different and the First Nation can help teachers to tap into alternative approaches. But they have to be open to it. The emphasis on university preparation really confines how [some] teacher's teach and what you teach. They don't know any different. And it might be for just one student [in the class who might be going to university], but they still think that is the priority.

I want to be more open to offering a more experiential curriculum, but I also know I am serving the requests of parents [implying non-TH citizens] who

don't want an 'experiential' education. Ultimately, I have to work with this, even though something otherwise might be wanted.

Overall, apparent within each of these tensions is a concern with the explicit and implicit intention of schools in a community seeking fulfilment of aspirations embedded with the tenets of a SGA and the orthodoxy of practice that has characterised the community since the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898. Ultimately, what will be the re-definition of curriculum? The commentary indicates such redefinition is still being operationalised, largely at the *what* and *how* level. Evidence indicates that there is, despite the significant development, a perpetuating 'conscientisation', as Freire (1970, 1988) refers, as a necessary foundation for constructive action for improving the curriculum experience for students. Evidence is that at the *why* level, which ultimately challenges the philosophical reason for education and the purpose of schooling is still being outworked, largely as a result of the proximal processes amongst stakeholders today and the resolute attention to this imperative by several stakeholders. As Friere (1997) asserts, "they must perceive the reality critically… and this must become the motivating force for liberating action" (p. 34).

Discussion and Implications

As the stakeholders commonly commented, a variety of factors have contributed to the significant and relatively unproblematic curriculum development that has occurred within this community school since the SGA inception. Notably are the factors of people, process, context and time. Also evident, and likely, most importantly, underscoring these four factors are the *dynamics* of these processes that have most significantly contributed to influencing the development, that is the increasingly more complex manifestation of curriculum as expressed in the experiences provided for students, both TH and non-TH, in this community. As evidenced in the commentary, central to the development has been the *proximal* processes, those patterns of activation that drive stability and change (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Critical to the development have been the constructive relationships of the various stakeholders, especially those central to the enactment of curriculum, to a shared purpose. In the commentary is evidence that these processes allow for the active engagement of the individual and group, occur often and are stable over time. It is this dynamic that ultimately provides for increasingly more complex interactions and, consequently, development along the developmental trajectory.

Despite the efficacy of Bronfenbrenner's model in understanding the influences on change, the model fails to give attention to the significant driving

force that causes change reflectively and critically towards the aspirations of the FN, embedded within the tenets of the SGA. As stated by (Wood & Lewthwaite, 2007) although Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model allows an encompassing overview that shows all the various influences, both internal and external, on curriculum development within this FN community and provides stakeholders a way of seeing the multitude of factors at all levels of society that may be preventing their educational aspirations to be reached, it is likely this understanding does little to upset perpetuating beliefs and practices that may continue to subordinate people who exist and operate under a more dominant system (Battiste and Henderson, 2000). Thus, the necessity of a critical and conscious awareness of perpetuating parameters of control on the developing social order of curriculum has been necessary as a transformative vehicle for resolving issues of domination and marginalization (Wood & Lewthwaite, 2007). Although progress has been made in this area, commentary suggests such parameters, to some extent, still exist. As asserted by a key stakeholder:

> I guess the only other thing now that I think about it, is establishing relationships. I think that for everybody who's in education, the number one thing is to develop and establish relationships and build them. And that's true in every single teaching situation. And I think it's especially valuable when you're moving to a new community and working in a community where you are expected to work towards community goals [not your goals but the community's goals]. I wanted to learn and I made it very clear that I needed to learn in order to support their children. And I think any educator who's coming to a new community, wherever it is, but especially in the north, needs to be honest and vulnerable and say 'I don't have all the answers, I don't have all the *right* answers and I need to learn from the community and with the community. Often, it is not that way. That's the only other thing I would remind any new teachers to do is to build the relations, make connections, and that would be not only the students, but also the parents and the greater community, and look for what is wanted and use the [human and physical] resources in the community to work towards these goals collectively, not on your own.

For this school community, exposure of and dialogue around some of the tensions is vital for working towards the achievement of aspirations identified through the multiple and ongoing phases of this study and embedded within the SGA. In drawing from other community based curriculum developments in Indigenous settings (Lewthwaite et al. 2012), these tensions are not seen by the authors as negatives. As Friere asserts (1998, p. 33), there must be an "authentic

form of thought and action" which is fundamental to the transformation of the neo-colonial condition. This critical consciousness is seen as the impetus for ongoing and more significant dialogue for the school community. This awareness is likely to serve as a conceptual framework for negotiating the future which could provide a basis for First Nations self-government of education that accommodates and minimizes tensions and conflicts (Schouls, 2003). As stated by one Elder:

> In our culture there is nothing more important than the learning that makes a person wise. The main thing the southern culture wants from school is 'head knowledge'. That is what it has always emphasized. I do not know why. It intrigues me.I think about what school would look like if we had worked together from the beginning to make the learning better for our younger ones. I look to the future in believing it will be more on our terms where both worlds can be combined. It will be not just about knowledge, but how to behave and be wise, not just knowing. This is what is happening now, but we have a long way to go.

As suggested by Fallon and Paquette (2012) [curriculum development] is not a question of simply replacing an existing competing epistemology. Epistemologies are not easily replaced as they are grounded in participant beliefs (Pajares, 1992) and as such will remain both viable and visible and, thus, open to critique and contestation. This draws attention to the importance of cooperation and collaboration in governance and as evidenced in this case, curriculum development. The question remains: Is the way it has negotiated the space between intended curriculum and enacted curriculum since SGA inception *adequate* for the future - recognising that the space is still occupied by tensions (Aoki, 2004), primarily grounded in differences most significantly at an epistemological level; that is *why* is it being learned and *for what purpose*?

Summary

Within the context of a Yukon First Nation's first decade of self-governance, this paper has explored the processes influencing, mainly positively, curriculum change; that is, the broad learning experience provided for its FN citizens and the citizens of the broader community. It has also explored the tensions that exist as a result of a change in governance agreements in regards to curriculum change. Curriculum development, in this study's case, has shown the centrality of SGAs and the Yukon Education Act in providing an environment and impetus for sanctioned change. It has also illustrated the importance of centrally-defined explicit curriculum imperatives being flexible enough for

negotiation at the community and, ultimately, classroom level. It has, above all, identified the significance of collaborative and active engagement and human resource utilisation as pivotal to curriculum development.

Finally, it has identified the reality of the tensions that exist when the intensions for curriculum enacted are drawn from our personal histories, both the colonised and the coloniser. As McKinley (2000) stated, schooling often fails to give priority to or even recognize the need for harmonizing curriculum with students' life-world cultures, in all aspects of the curriculum experience provided for students, not just through the content engaged with, the native language learned and the culturally appropriate learning strategies endorsed. The intentions of curricula, both overt and covert, have historically not adequately ground the priorities of Indigenous communities because curricula are largely expressions of the dominant culture. Upsetting this dominance is problematic, especially when there is a lack of critical awareness. The advent of SGAs for this FN indicate that the tenets of the SGA are not perceived, thus far, by stakeholders to represent a form of neo-colonialism; instead, it is providing evidence of being a vehicle for facilitating decolonization (Fallon and Paquette, 2012). Despite this promise of possibility for curriculum, there is evidence of a critical awareness, at least among some stakeholders, of a form of neo-colonialism which ultimately prevents some of the fundamental epistemological considerations (McCue, 2004) for TH education being actualised. This consciousness provides the impetus for recognising and negotiating the tensioned space, a space which has been pivotal to the successes achieved over the past decade and in which the promise of doing so for the decades ahead abides.

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