

# Motivations and Experiences of Teachers in a Northern Manitoba Community

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*This paper utilizes an exploratory case study method to examine the factors that attract and motivate teachers to stay in a remote, northern Canadian community. Bakan's (1966) framework of agency and communion, provides a lens for exploring and understanding teachers' experiences of working in the north where the term "the North" is understood not simply as one of two geographical poles, but also represents a consciousness of place. Subsequently, this study expands the conceptualization of Bakan's notion of communion to include both the effects of emotion, which can be understood specifically as public, social, and in relation to others; as well as socio-spatial factors that illustrate the ways in which space is conceived, perceived and lived. Given the amount of human and financial capital required to recruit and retain teachers, as well as the negative implications that high levels of teacher attrition have on student success and emotional well-being, it is important to understand teachers' perspectives on their experiences working in communities that are perceived as hard to staff.*

*Cet article adopte une méthodologie exploratoire reposant sur l'étude de cas pour examiner les facteurs qui attirent les enseignants vers une communauté isolée du Nord canadien, et les motivent à y rester. Le cadre de l'agentivité et de la communion de Bakan (1966) offre une perspective à partir de laquelle explorer et comprendre les expériences des enseignants qui travaillent dans le nord, où l'expression « le nord » ne désigne pas uniquement un des deux pôles géographiques, mais aussi la conscience d'un lieu. Par la suite, l'étude étend la conceptualisation de la notion de communion de Bakan pour inclure les effets de l'émotion (que l'on comprend comme étant publiques, sociales et par rapport aux autres) ainsi que les facteurs socio-spatiaux qui illustrent les façons dont les lieux sont conçus, perçus et vécus. Compte tenu du capital humain et financier nécessaire pour recruter les enseignants et les maintenir en poste, ainsi que des incidences négatives qu'a le taux élevé de départ volontaire des enseignants sur le rendement et le bien-être émotionnel des élèves, il est important de comprendre les perspectives des enseignants sur leurs expériences de travail dans des communautés perçues comme étant difficiles à pourvoir en personnel.*

## Introduction

The challenge of attracting teachers to "hard-to-staff" schools is a global phenomenon, extending well beyond the geographical boundaries of Canada (Cooper & Alverado, 2006). Although some remote, northern Canadian school districts provide financial incentives to attract and retain teachers, the supply and number of teachers in Canada's north remains inadequate.

Other factors—aside from financial incentives—also impact teachers’ decisions to seek employment in these harder to staff communities, and to remain teaching and living in them (Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010). Kitchenham and Chasteauneuf propose that in the Canadian context few studies have examined the complexity of the challenges that northern school districts face in recruiting and retaining teachers. Of the research that does exist on teachers’ career decisions, much of it frames the motivators, attractors, and detractors within traditional heuristic approaches that may not represent the complexity that comes with making career choices (e.g., Corbett, 2009; Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010; Williment, 2003).

Teachers’ career choices are predominantly framed by theories that focus on factors related to individual freedom to choose (Sinclair, 2008). Less, however, is known about the socially structured factors that also influence teachers’ career choices (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997), and yet social factors have long been recognized as central to the work within schools. For example, almost a century ago, Waller (1932) proposed that the world of school is a social world, and that the individuals who spend time working and learning together in a school co-exist in a tangled web of interrelationships. It is, in fact, this web of human interrelationships that makes up the social world of school. Although life within schools and the work of teaching are recognized as social and contextual events, career motivation theory remains rooted in notions of individualistic self-determination (Guay, Senecal, Gauthier, & Fernet, 2003).

In order to better understand the interrelated factors that prompt teachers to take teaching jobs and remain in remote, northern Canadian communities, it seems worthwhile to examine career theories that more fully consider the social and spatial complexity, and interrelatedness of the factors that teachers consider when contemplating where to work. Bakan’s (1966) framework of agency and communion, while certainly not “new” and, admittedly, limited, provides an alternative model to the dominant orthodoxy of career motivation studies by considering the intersections of psychological, sociological and spatial factors that certainly influence career choices.

### **Teacher Retention and Attrition**

Although large numbers of enthusiastic educators enter the teaching profession each year, the rate of teacher attrition in comparison to other occupations and professions has emerged as an international problem (Hong, 2010). In the United States, the teacher attrition rate has hovered steadily at around 15% in the twenty-six-year period of 1988 until 2014 (Di Carlo, 2015). In Canada, national data is more difficult to retrieve as there is no central authority for teaching in Canada, and the limited provincial statistics that do exist indicate significant levels of job dissatisfaction (Clark & Antonelli, 2009; Martin, Dolmage, & Sharpe, 2012). However, in one relatively recent survey from Ontario, Clark and Antonelli (2009) found that approximately 18% of new teachers were at risk of leaving the profession. In another Canadian study, one that surveyed teachers in the mostly rural province of Saskatchewan, over half of the respondents indicated that they would leave their position if they had another viable career option (Martin et al., 2012).

Ball (2003) argues that an outcome of the increased pressures that teachers now face, pressures that promote the ideals of managerialism, may lead to a spike in the already high rates of teacher attrition. These demands are manifest in increasing discourses of accountability, high-stakes testing, and mandated curricular standards (Johnson et al., 2001). Foster (as cited in Valadez 2003), suggests that the enthusiasm with which new teachers enter the profession

wanes in the face of the numerous obstacles they encounter, negatively impacting both satisfaction they derive from teaching, and also their decisions to stay in or leave the profession (Ingersoll, 1999). Job satisfaction is usually defined as having positive feelings towards multiple facets of one's employment, including competitive compensation, professional autonomy, and opportunities to collaborate with colleagues. Not surprisingly, job satisfaction greatly increases employee retention (Society for Human Resource Management, 2009).

Teachers' job satisfaction has been defined as, "teachers' affective reactions to their work or to their teaching role" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011, p. 1030). Much of the research on teachers' job satisfaction draws on general responses from traditional large-scale survey data about individual indicators of job satisfaction, and at times variables of circumstances (Skaalvik & Skaalvik). It is less common, however, for such studies to focus on job satisfaction and delve into individuals' emotional experiences, *per se*. This gap is noteworthy as some research has demonstrated that teachers' job satisfaction, and their decisions to leave the profession are affected by their relations to the school context, feelings of belonging, and emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik).

### **Teacher Retention and Student Success**

Importantly, teachers' career satisfaction has strong implications for students, in that teacher attrition negatively impacts students' academic success and their well-being (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Day & Gu, 2010; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005; Mueller, Carr-Stewart, Steeves, & Marshall, 2011; White & Reid, 2008). Some researchers argue that teachers who do not feel supported in their work may be less motivated to do their best work in the classroom (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Ostroff, 1992), while highly satisfied teachers are less likely to change schools or to leave the teaching profession (Choy et al., 1993). Students in schools with high staff turnover rates, as a result, tend to be taught by a succession of novice teachers who lack the educational competence that professional experience brings (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). Notably, job dissatisfaction is most apparent in schools with high populations of children and families with low socio-economic status, visible minorities, and Indigenous students (Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010; Williment, 2003). Thus, teacher turnover disrupts the school environment, is unsettling for students, is magnified in schools with vulnerable populations, and results in the shift of valuable educational resources away from student support towards costly staff replacement efforts. Thus, it is important to attend to teachers' job satisfaction as high rates of satisfaction inversely affects attrition rates, and high levels of teacher attrition consequently affect students' success and well-being, particularly in schools with vulnerable populations (Mueller et al., 2011).

While the literature on teacher retention and attrition often resides in and is generated from the fields of psychology or sociology, there are also some important insights offered by the literature from rural and teacher education, specifically in relation to place-consciousness (Gruenewald, 2003a, 2003b; White & Reid, 2008). Initially informed by geography and advancing a socio-spatial dialectic, place-consciousness calls for the recognition of how space is conceived, perceived, and lived (Soja, 1996). While a singularly agreed upon definition of what "rural" means remains elusive (Wallin & Sackney, 2003), the social construction of teaching in rural, remote and northern school settings is often considered as being deficient or lesser than metropolitan experiences (Reid et al., 2010). Some rural and northern communities may share similar difficult realities, such as lower socio-economic levels; higher rates of unemployment,

poverty and isolation, reduced educational or social opportunities, or levels of educational attainment (Wallin & Sackney, 2003; White & Reid, 2008).

However, the term rural conjures something particular for Canadians; rural is “socially ascribed and inscribed” (Roberts & Green, 2013, p. 766) as the prairie; a scene, economy and culture of agriculture, farming, and generally, whiteness. The discourse of what is rural in a Canadian context differs greatly from the social constructions of the “North,” which is generally considered to be above the 53rd parallel, and still maintains an imagery of underdeveloped and barren communities, an icy frontier with greater Indigenous populations than in rural communities (Matheson, 2013, p. 1). Therefore, although theories of place-consciousness emerges from the field of rural education, and call for attention to the particularities of space and the cultural influences of spatiality, it also means that, as scholars who work and reside in Canada, the social constructions and assumptions residing within rural education differ greatly from conceptions of Canada’s North. Thus, we draw on rural education’s offerings of place-consciousness theories, but do so within the context of northern education.

While the essentialized narratives of rural and northern are common in Canadian lexicon, place-consciousness works to disrupt these essentialized discourses, highlighting the particularities of place, and arguing for a consideration of why place matters in education. This is of particular importance within the current educational context of standardization and accountability that endorses a “generic education for ‘anywhere,’” (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 646) that could easily “deteriorate to an education for ‘nowhere’” (Noddings as cited in Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 646). Thus, place-conscious education challenges dominant deficit discourses of the North, and argues for a recognition of the particularities of place, attending to “the set of relationships, actions and meanings that are produced in and through the daily practice of people in a particular place and time” (Reid et al., 2010, p. 269).

Importantly, place-conscious education reminds us of the metro-centric views with which discourses of rural—and in this case, northern—education are framed and informed, and which subsequently inform the experiences of teachers (Green & Reid, 2004). The discourses of teaching in the North are positioned as deficit experiences, and perpetuate the assumptions that northern teaching positions are short-term events, or stepping stones to jobs in the city (Reid et al., 2010; White & Reid, 2008). These metro-centric views permeate teacher education programs, as well as the teacher recruitment and retention literature. Reframing teacher recruitment and retention to include place-consciousness requires attention to situated practices that are acknowledged as “speaking from somewhere” (Green & Reid, 2004, p. 255); practices that occur socially, spatially, and historically, subsequently shifting the discourse of northern teaching from the individuality of the event to that of considering particularities of place, people, community, and ecology.

In many remote, northern Canadian communities, teacher attrition can be as high as 40% annually (Kutsyuruba, Godden, & Tregunna, 2014). Yet, in the community of Norway House in Frontier School Division (described in more detail in the methodology section), where this case study was focused, the historical attrition rate is approximately 25%, which is lower than the rate typically found in other remote, northern Canadian school communities (Derksen, 2014). Understanding the motivations and experiences that influence teachers’ decisions to choose to teach in northern communities, and remain in them may inform our understandings of the ways in which remote and northern school boards might reframe their recruitment and retention strategies, thereby reducing teacher attrition rates.

As White and Reid (2008) assert, “it is widely acknowledged that the nature and quality of

the teachers who staff rural, regional, and remote schools impact the quality and equity of educational experiences for the people in these areas” (p. 3). Therefore, as university teacher educators in Manitoba, where attrition in remote, northern school communities is greater than in metropolitan centres, it is our responsibility to support recruitment and retention efforts in northern and remote communities, in order to better serve the students who live and learn in them. As teacher educators, we need to consider and understand the factors that attract and retain teachers to those communities, so that we might better inform our teacher candidates’ understandings of the North, and thus position teaching in the North as a viable career option.

### **Shifting from Dominant Models of Career Motivation Theory**

While various career theories have been used to understand individuals’ career choices and motivation (Leung, 2008), Hargreaves (2010) acknowledges that even with its limitations, the legacy of Lortie’s (1975) model of why individuals choose to become teachers and stay in the profession remains formidable. With respect to teaching careers, Lortie identified three factors that attract individuals into the teaching profession: (a) intrinsic motivations, including the job activity itself, such as the activity of teaching children, and an interest in using their subject matter knowledge and expertise; (b) extrinsic motivations, including aspects of the job that are not inherent in the work itself, such as long holidays, level of pay, and status; (c) altruistic motivations, such as seeing teaching as a socially worthwhile and important job, a desire to help children succeed, and a desire to help society improve.

While Lortie’s (1975) framework has endured almost forty years, it is worth noting the critiques of the most common career theories suggest that motivators and detractors are exclusively matters of individual attributes and choice, and devoid of context, social situations, or relationships with others. This is inadequate in today’s teaching environments in which factors such as, increased accountability and managerialism (Ball, 2003), and subsequent teacher demoralization impact teachers’ decisions to leave (Santoro, 2011). In other words, traditional career theories that focus solely on factors of individual need and material-gain fall short in describing the nuances of external factors, and their subsequent social and emotional implications for teachers’ decisions to stay or leave. Thus, there is a need to re-envision career motivation theories, the majority of which are informed by the literature of individual psychology that is at least a century old, and have been heavily critiqued for their male-dominated perspectives (Marshall, 1989). Although more progressive, feminist, and critical interpretations have emerged within psychology, traditional career theories often remain rooted in rational and individualist perspectives that neglect the working and maintenance of emotion and power within social, political and historical milieu. Therefore, we sought a conceptual framework that recognized broader social and contextual factors, and so engaged Bakan’s (1966) concepts of agency and communion.

Bakan (1966) proposed that agency and communion are two fundamental modalities of human existence. Agency refers to an individual actuality within an environment, an assertion of the self, and the experience of competence and of achievement. Alternatively, communion refers to a person’s desire to relate to, cooperate with, and merge with others, recognizing the social world within a particular context. Bakan described the concepts of agency and communion as follows:

I have adopted the terms “agency” and “communion” to characterize two fundamental modalities in

the existence of living forms, agency for the existence of an organism as an individual, and communion for the participation of the individual in some larger organism of which the individual is a part. Agency manifests itself in self-protection, self-assertion, and self-expansion; communion manifests itself in the sense of being at one with other organisms. Agency manifests itself in the formation of separations; communion in the lack of separations. Agency manifests itself in isolation, alienation, and aloneness; communion in contact, openness, and union. Agency manifests itself in the urge to master; communion in non-contractual cooperation. (pp. 14-15)

According to Marshall (1989), agency and communion are two “basic coping strategies for dealing with the uncertainties and anxieties of being alive” (p. 279). Agency orientations provide fulfilment through one’s accomplishments, and sense of independence and separateness, whereas communion orientations provide fulfilment through relationships with others, and a sense of belonging (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994).

In many disciplines, agency and communion (Bakan, 1966) have been used for decades as a conceptual frame to understand human behaviour, and have been useful to examine individuals’ styles of reasoning, social relationships, personality, and self-concept (Bakan, 1966; Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Marshall, 1989). Therefore, notions of agency and communion offer a useful framework within career motivation theories, as they provide a lens for seeing beyond individualistic and material factors of career motivation (such as salary and benefits), and acknowledge communal factors such as relationships, community, and belonging. These latter factors have long been overlooked in career motivation theories.

In addition, we assert that a framework of agency and communion is of importance in that it is one of the few career theories that acknowledge an emotional accounting of teachers’ motivations. Emotion has long been unacknowledged and under-studied within education (Nias, 1996; Zembylas, 2005a, p. 468). There are some notable exceptions, including the significant feminist contributions that focus on emotions from educational philosophers, such as Boler (1999) and Noddings (1984, 1996). In addition, Blackmore (1996, 1999) considers the emotional labour of leadership; Hargreaves (1997, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2005) focuses on teacher emotion and educational change from within leadership perspectives, while others (Day & Leitch, 2001; Zembylas 2002a, 2002b, 2005a, 2005b) have drawn attention to the role and value of emotion in teaching. However, there are few studies of teacher job satisfaction that seek to account for the relationship between satisfaction and factors of teaching circumstances (Moe, Pazzaglia, & Ronconi, 2010; Sargent & Hannum, 2005; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Job satisfaction and attrition research are often large-scale studies that are unable to attend to the qualitative nuances of teachers’ experiences. A goal of this study was to focus the analysis on teachers’ accounts of their experiences in a remote, Northern Canadian community through Bakan’s (1966) conceptual framework of agency and communion, and to consider to how these two concepts are mediated by emotion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011)

Bakan’s (1966) theory of agency and communion, although almost fifty years old, is one of the few theories from the career motivation literature that considers career choice beyond those that regard career choices as being narrowly individualistic (e.g., Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Lortie, 1975). Bakan’s conception of communion attempts to account for one’s relationships with others and alludes to the greater context of experiences, “recognizing a person’s social connectedness” (Leonard, 1997, p. 823). However, we expand these conceptions of communion to include perspectives of place-consciousness in order to consider not only one’s relationships to others, but also one’s relationships to the particularities of place, and the socio-spatial

dialectic on teachers' motivations. Therefore, we use a reconceptualized understanding of communion as a way to recognize the importance of having, knowing, and understanding one's relationship to place. Drawing on more recent rural and teacher education literature also creates a more contemporary, nuanced, and place-conscious approach to understanding teachers' experiences in Northern places, expanding possibilities for analysis and theorizing, and pushing the limits of current individualistic and metro-centric understandings within career theory.

The objectives of the study were to examine the factors that teachers identified as the motivators and attractors to teach in a remote, northern community, and what factors might deter them from remaining there as a teacher in terms of agency and communion. We were particularly interested in what the analysis revealed about teachers' use of and engagement with terms of emotion and relationships to place. Thus, we believe this framing of agency and communion will allow us to elucidate motivations for teachers to work and stay in remote, northern locations, provide important insights into career motivation theory, and help us, as teacher educators, to consider implications for our work with teacher candidates who may elect to teach in the North.

### **Methodology**

This study utilized a qualitative, exploratory case study approach. Case studies are particularly useful for studying individuals in an in-depth, holistic manner that allows for deep understanding (Merriam, 1998). As Merriam points out:

A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. (p. 19)

Creswell (2003) defines case study as "an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (such as: an activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection" (p. 485). Creswell recommends case study as a methodology if the problem to be studied "relates to developing an in-depth understanding of a 'case' or bounded system" (p. 496), and if the purpose is to understand "an event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (p. 496). According to Creswell, "'Bounded' means that the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries" (p. 485). For this particular case study, we chose an exploratory approach, which "emphasizes the study of a phenomenon within its real-world context" (Yin, 2013, p. 5). This study was particularly suitable for an exploratory case study design because the case was a "bounded system," in so much as "the system," in this case, the remote, northern community of Norway House, Manitoba, was bounded by both context and geography (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2013). Because we were working from the particular context of Norway House in which to consider the phenomenon of teachers' motivations and experiences, an exploratory case study was useful in providing preliminary results that illustrate emerging theories.

### **The Community**

According to Historica Canada, an independent organization devoted to enhancing awareness of Canadian history and citizenship, Norway House, Manitoba:

Consists of two closely related communities along Little Playgreen Lake and the east channel of the Nelson River, 30 kilometres north of Lake Winnipeg and 460 kilometres north of Winnipeg. The Norway House Indian Reserve, population 4758 according to the 2011 Statistics Canada Census, with Rossville as its centre, is under the jurisdiction of the federal Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, as well as an elected band chief and council. Since 1970 the non-reserve community (population 308, according to 2011 Census data) has been recognized under the Northern Affairs Act. A mayor and councillors govern it.

Located at the junction of several water routes, screened by a rocky shoulder from Little Playgreen Lake, Norway House was a hub of the Hudson's Bay Company's (HBC) fur-trade and supply lines, and an administrative centre for Rupert's Land. Three HBC posts, namely Jack River, 1796-1817; Norway House I, 1814-24; Norway House II, from 1827 were built in the area, the last being at the site of the present community. (Lyon, 2012, para. 1-2)

Frontier School Division is the largest geographic school division in Manitoba, covering 440,000 square kilometres. Its schools range in size from 5 to 1,100 students and serves communities of six distinct Aboriginal peoples (Derksen, 2014). Frontier School Division educates students from 14 First Nations. In Norway House, Frontier School Division provides services for both treaty and non-treaty students through two community schools, namely Jack River School (a Kindergarten to Grade six school), and Helen Betty Osborne Ininiw Education Resource Centre (a comprehensive school of over 1,100 students for Kindergarten to Grade 12 students).

### **Data Sources**

The researchers visited the remote, northern community of Norway House for a three-day period, and engaged in "detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 2008, p. 61), where the context was a key factor. All of the teachers in both schools were invited to participate in the study. Primarily, data was collected from semi-structured individual interviews with teachers from both community schools. In total, eight interviews were conducted, each lasting between 45 and 70 minutes long. The goals of the interviews were to: 1) gather opinions, perceptions, and attitudes of the teachers about the attractors and motivators that drew them to work in Norway House, 2) examine the factors they said motivated them to stay, and 3) explore the factors that they foresaw as affecting their decisions to leave Norway House. The researchers supplemented the interview data with field notes they made over the course of the visit about the community and its services.

### **Data Analysis**

With respect to this study, participants' interview transcripts were read and analyzed in relation to the themes of agency and communion (Bakan, 1966). According to McAdams (2002), agency encompasses a wide range of psychological and motivational ideas, including the concepts of strength, power, expansion, mastery, control, dominance, autonomy, separation, and independence. Most accounts of important autobiographical experiences are couched in agentic terms to one degree or another. In McAdams' view, communion also encompasses psychological and motivational ideas, those concerning love, friendship, intimacy, sharing, belonging, affiliation, merger, union, and nurturance. At its core, communion involves people coming together in caring and communicative relationships, and again, we expanded this notion of



communion to include one's relationship with the particularities of place.

When we began the data analysis we did not plan to examine the emotional responses of the participants, *per se*. However, upon reviewing the data, emotion emerged as an important element for us to attend to. While Bakan's (1966) theory of agency and communion helped to identify and classify factors of motivation and experiences, we found that considerations of emotion were useful in surfacing these factors. We consider emotion as occurring in relation and in a public forum that is socially constructed and politically informed (Boler, 1999; Zorn & Boler, 2007). The term communion, itself, conjures notions of being in relation with another. Considered etymologically the word "communion" is derived from the Latin "communio," which means: "fellowship, mutual participation, a sharing," and was used by Augustine, who believed the word was derived from *com-* "with, together" and *unus* "oneness, union" (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010). We see these attributes as a feminist conception of emotion, and elucidated in the participants' responses through communion.

### **Findings: Communion Matters**

During the analysis, we categorized the findings into either "agency" or "communion" and, in keeping with Bakan's (1966) assertions, recognized the overlapping nature of these concepts, acknowledging that some responses straddled both categories. For example, we placed experiences in nature into both categories because it conjures both an agentic experience, as well as a communal one (discussed in further detail below). Typically, self-protection, self-assertion, and self-expansion, manifesting in isolation, alienation, and aloneness are indicators of agency (Bakan, 1966). Agency-oriented experiences included individual accomplishments, and a sense of independence, and separateness (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994). Signs of communion, on the other hand, are cooperation, contact, union, openness, a sense of being at one with other organisms, and a lack of separation (Bakan, 1966). Teachers' expressed communion-oriented experiences in their descriptions of their relationships with others and sense of belonging (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994). In addition, participants expressed a sense of communion in regards to their experiences with the particularities of the place, geography, and nature. Once we had categorized the findings, we considered the ways in which the participants expressed the emotional aspects of their career choice in order to consider their responses with greater nuance, and to elucidate the social and emotional factors of communion.

### **Factors of Agency and Communion**

Teachers identified several agency factors, which we categorized as working conditions that had attracted them to teach in Norway House. Not surprisingly, and consistent with the literature, the factors that had attracted these teachers to Norway House included: very competitive salaries and benefits packages, teacher housing provided by the school division at a subsidized rate, and partner employment and permanent contract offers. We identified teacher eligibility for a paid one-year leave after nine years of service (through a deferred salary leave plan), as an additional agentic-factor that, in part, enticed teachers to come to and to stay in Norway House.

Many of the teachers noted that they were motivated to remain in Norway House due to specific factors that we considered as conceptions of "communion" (Bakan, 1966). In fact, from a categorical analysis, teachers made many more references to factors of communion than to factors of agency. Communal factors that attracted teachers to Norway House and enticed them

to stay included: feelings of safety within the community, new friendships, collegial support, administrative support, professional autonomy, and recreational opportunities available in the community (such as, hunting, fishing, and paddling). As Reid et al. (2010) acknowledge, “society and space interact so that it is not just location and landmarks that define a community but the people one meets and interacts with and what one does together in their environs” (p. 270). These communal factors experienced with people and within these relationships were central to the positive experiences of the teachers we interviewed.

Teachers were more inclined to move to Norway House if the teacher could find work in the community, or in the case where the teacher had a partner, both could find work. Teachers also indicated that were attracted to teach in Norway House if either the teacher, or the teacher’s partner, had family in the community. However, some of the teachers who did not have family in the community expressed that they would likely move out of the community once they had children, so they could raise them in closer proximity to extended family (for example, parents and grandparents), or move to a larger centre so that their children could have greater access to recreational opportunities, such as competitive sports and dance classes. Teachers’ marital and immediate-family status, one aspect of Bakan’s (1996) notion of communion, had either a positive or negative effect on teacher motivation to work and remain in Norway House, and ultimately affected teachers’ motivations to stay in Norway House.

It is also important to note that Norway House itself is a beautiful and robust community. Its amenities include an indoor hockey rink, grocery stores, a coffee shop, an airport, a few small restaurants, well-maintained teacherages (i.e., housing provided for teachers), proximity to a larger town (Thompson, Manitoba which has a population of approximately 13,000 people and is a 3 hour drive away), and road access (an ice road in the winter and a ferry in the summer) that allow for a relatively comfortable lifestyle. One participant described Norway House as “a plum” location for teaching positions within Frontier School Division because it afforded this lifestyle. These descriptions demonstrate the importance of the particularities of this place, and the impact it has on the quality of life for the participants within this community. However, these views also highlight the metro-centric perspectives of what is considered a quality lifestyle, particularly access to urban amenities.

The ways in which teachers identified leadership factors, particularly in regards to school administrators suggested that these factors were an important and positive attribute of their experience. Teachers stated that the school administration contributed to their overall job satisfaction in regards to factors of agency (providing resources, autonomy, and support), and notions of communion (fostering a well-developed school community and “family”-type relationships amongst the staff). The schools in Norway House are well established, appear to have positive reputations, and benefit from strong leadership, sufficient resources and often long-serving staff.

### **Communion: Emotion and Place**

Teachers’ narratives highlighted the notion of being in communion with the other, particularly with respect to other teachers. For example, one participant explained, “I feel comfortable here and get a lot of support. Lots of teachers support me.” While another explained, in relation to the organization of similar grade teachers working in close proximity, “It’s so nice to have all the teachers kind of tucked away off in a corner. Like if you want to hang out with your friends everyone is right there; you are not by yourself.” The participants spoke of comfort, support and

friendship, while others spoke of happiness, cooperation, and a sense of family. These descriptors illustrate the deep emotional commitment that these teachers have made to their relationships with other teachers. These relationships are outcomes of emotional investments that occurred publically and collaboratively, and were referenced in response to our questions about staying in Norway House.

Some of the teachers interviewed also demonstrated a commitment to the greater community. For example, one said:

I have become accepted as part of the community now, and that takes some time. The people here have to be able to trust you. I feel comfortable here. I feel like a lot of the people here—I am pretty much family with them now. Most of my friends are here.

Other participants revealed their contentment with and within the community, describing it as safe, warm, inviting, supportive, and family-oriented. The participants felt positive about the community and their relationships with the people in it. One said, “This is our career. What we plan to do is stay here in Norway House for the rest of our life. Raise our children here. I’m a lifer.”

Another important example of the ways in which the participants experienced communion, was in their relationship to nature. Although, one could argue that this is an attribute of agency in that it privileges the individual and features of “alone-ness,” we argue that the ways in which the participants described their engagements with nature spoke to a “sense of being at one with other organisms” (Bakan, 1966), and experiencing “fulfilment through their relationship with others” (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994). One teacher described this relationship as, “I like nature, and I like the quiet. It just seemed like a good place to be.” Others commented on enjoying the outdoors and the scenery. The participants described their own specific communion with nature, of being fulfilled by solitude, natural beauty, and outdoor activity.

While there is a paucity of research on the affect that the physical geography of place has on teacher recruitment, retention and attrition it is, arguably, conceivable that by virtue of living and teaching in the North, teachers’ attachments related to the natural environment or social environment of the community affects their decisions to stay or leave (Brown, 1993). As one participant noted, “I love the land...I can walk across the road and put my canoe into the water and go...This community has become home.” Community as a geo-spatial location and one that refers to the physical geography in which the community is located—such as a lake, hills, or open fields—affects people’s sense of satisfaction and belonging (Heller, 1989).

Interestingly, aside from one participant citing housing difficulties as a motivator to leave (a factor of agency), factors for leaving primarily were concerned issues of communion, particularly communion with, or the lack of communion with family. Naturally, this is a factor of distance, particularly with the teachers who were from Ontario and Canada’s east coast. Significantly, the participants were not motivated to leave because they were worried about or missed being in personal communion with their family; rather, they were concerned that their children (or their future, unborn children) would not have the opportunity to be in communion with their family if they remained in Norway House. One participant said:

I don't think Norway House will always be the place [we live], but I think somewhere North. [It will be] somewhere where our son will have more things to do. The only activity for kids is hockey and he doesn't play. I think that's the only downside [of living here].

Another explained, "I'm leaving Norway House this year ... it's hard with the baby. If we didn't have the baby, I would probably work out until 10 years. There is nothing to do with the baby here, nothing." Motivators to leave centred on children; either that they would miss the opportunity to be in communion with family, or that they would be denied the opportunity to be in communion in a larger community that offered programs and services not present in Norway House.

## **Discussion**

The data analysis provided several insights regarding issues of agency and communion affecting teacher retention that may be of interest to northern and remote schools, school divisions overseeing northern and remote schools, and faculties of education. The importance of experiencing emotional engagement via relationships with other teachers, a sense of belonging within the community, and personal relationship with the natural world was prevalent in the participants' responses, and yet these factors remain under-stated in discussions of career theory and job satisfaction, especially in relation to northern and remote settings. It is evident that educational administrators and career theorists must understand and attend to factors of communion, including the emotional effects of teachers being in communion with other teachers and community-members. Rather than envisioning the achievement of retention via the bondage of individuals (through marriage and financial constraint), considerations of retention should include a more ethical position of emotional satisfaction, specifically in regards to ideas of communion.

A study by Freedman and Appleman (2009) that examined the experiences of teacher candidates in inner-city settings, illustrates similar findings, revealing that the teacher candidates often stayed in the "hard-to-staff" inner-city settings in which they were hired, in part because they remained connected to some of their program cohort peers, but also because of the relationships they developed with their new teacher-colleagues. These newly hired teachers cited the importance of having colleagues with whom they could work, and also the importance of making connections with others beyond school settings, such as through book clubs. Similarly, Oskineegish and Berger (2013), in exploring successful teachers in northern Ontario communities, found that relationships and mentorships were important in supporting pre-service and in-service teachers in northern settings. It seems that relationships with others—both professional and social—for teachers in northern schools are essential in supporting teachers in their decisions to stay.

In regards to communion and its spatial elements, teachers' experiences with and in nature are an important finding. Teacher recruitment and retention must acknowledge the importance of teachers' experiences beyond the classroom walls, beyond factors of agency, and recognize the significance of place and of one's experience in specific places. This has an impact on teachers' experiences and their decisions to stay or leave. These communal experiences with nature highlight the differences between residing in and inhabiting a place. Whereas residency is considered a short-term experience, inhabitation is to dwell "in an intimate, organic, and mutually nurturing relationship with a place" (Orr as cited in Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 9). This means that teacher recruitment and retention needs to better understand the significance of place and teachers' experiences within specific spaces, becoming more place-conscious in the ways in which recruitment and retention efforts are conceptualized and enacted.

Finally, the findings also suggest that there is much that teacher educators, associated with

faculties and colleges of education, should consider if they are seriously committed to preparing teachers for all of Canada's schools regardless of whether they are urban, rural, or remote, northern communities. Although some research findings suggest remote, northern schools are hard to staff (Kitchenham, & Chasteauneuf, 2010; Mueller et al., 2011; Williment, 2003), the findings of this small study indicate that the participants were overwhelmingly positive about working and living in Norway House, Manitoba. This fact challenges the stereotypes that influence some teacher candidates' perceptions of teaching in remote, northern Canadian communities, and highlights the importance of challenging essentializations of and supporting place-conscious approaches to understanding remote, rural and northern communities within teacher education programs. These positive experiences speak to the importance of recognizing "the unique nature of Canada's Northern mosaic" (Matheson, 2013, p. 1), and the particularities of northern communities each informed by specific and varying issues of demographics, geography and culture (Reid et al., 2010). It also points to the need for future research that might continue to work against essentialized perceptions.

### **Conclusion**

Given the amount of human and financial capital that remote, northern school administrators invest in recruiting and retaining teachers to work in their communities (Williment, 2003), it is important that they understand the factors that attract and motivate teachers to remain in these communities. Given the need to better prepare teachers for work in these school communities, this study illustrates the importance of considering factors of agency and communion—specifically in relation to emotion and socio-spatial dialectics—when considering teachers' satisfaction in teaching in a remote, northern Manitoba school-community.

The theories of place-consciousness offer an important lens in this area of research, and in foregrounding the generally metro-centric views of teacher education. For example, teacher education programs need to acknowledge their generally metro-centric views and include a greater emphasis on place-consciousness in regards to curriculum and practicum. Currently the emphasis focuses on teaching as simply an event occurring within the classroom, as opposed to locating teaching as an engagement within the broader community (White & Reid, 2008).

Our responsibility, as teacher educators and teacher education researchers, is to be effective as a force for rural-regional sustainability by providing pre-service teachers with access to the professional and pedagogic capital that can successfully underwrite their investment in rural social space. (Reid et al., 2010, p. 269)

A critical look at the teacher recruitment discourse, for example, "hard-to-staff", would highlight the ways in which teacher recruitment and retention within northern communities maintains negative and stereotypical assumptions. By marginalizing rural, northern and remote practicum and teaching experiences, deficit discourses and essentialized understandings of northern experiences continue to be reified.

Additionally, communion and place-consciousness are useful in challenging established practices in teacher recruitment, such as incentive systems that encourage teachers to take rural positions. These practices, although perhaps useful in the short run, perpetuate transiency that creates distrust between the community and the teachers in the long run (White & Reid, 2008). These dated practices privilege factors of agency, and dismiss the importance of communion and

supporting new teachers to the community in developing modes of communion with others, the community and the place. A greater focus on communion would recognize the need for teacher recruitment to consider the necessary elements of teachers' educational, cultural and social capital (Reid et al. 2008) that would benefit those teachers who work in the North. Arguably, these factors might sustain teachers longer and with greater satisfaction in the North than incentive systems that respond only to factors of agency.

Similar to other research findings (Corbett, 2009; Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010; Mueller et al., 2010; Williment, 2003), Bakan's (1966) factors of agency (such as salary and benefits) are described as factors that attract teachers to the North. However, what this study offers are conceptualizations of the more nuanced factors of communion and the incredible influence they have on teachers' motivations to remain in a remote, northern community. Teachers' descriptions of factors that motivate them to stay in Norway House, Manitoba emphasizes these notions of communion—the sense of being in relationships, cooperation and belonging—as significant emotionally-laden factors. Moreover, this study highlights the importance of considering the ways in which emotions play a socializing role within these factors, ensuring that these events are neither solely individualistic nor private. Rather, emotion is experienced publically, socially and in relation to others, thus significantly influencing teachers' decisions to work and to stay in northern communities.

Finally, factors of communion highlight the importance and the impact of the greater social and natural surroundings on teachers' overall experiences, and motivations to work and stay in the North. These factors have long been overlooked within the recruitment and retention literature. Because the quality of teachers greatly impacts the quality of experience for students (White & Reid, 2008), teacher education, retention, and recruitment needs to broaden its understandings of Northern teaching experiences, disrupt deficit discourses, and engage teachers in ways that not only affect their agency, but more importantly, that engage teachers' opportunities to be in communion; communion with others, within relationships, and within the diverse and varying communities in which they might teach.

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