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Paper Title Educational Change and Self-Governing Agreements: A Yukon First Nation Case Study

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Session Title Indigenous Methodologies and Praxis: Case Studies of Educational Success

Session Type Roundtable Presentation

Presentation Date 4/27/2017

Presentation Location San Antonio, Texas

Descriptors Culturally Responsive Schooling

Methodology Qualitative

Unit SIG-Indigenous Peoples of the Americas

DOI 10.302/1182129

Objectives: 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 People's 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 YFNs (Yukon First Nations), called Self-Government Agreements (SGAs). SGAs, which 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. With the establishment of SGFNs, each FN, with the required co-operation of Yukon Education (YE), faces the challenge of reversing assimilation and regaining a sense of identity especially within the processes that influence the education of their children, especially at the school and, more specifically, classroom level. Although this reversal draws into question the need for changes in the content or *what* of classrooms, it moves beyond this to reconsider the *how* and *why* of classrooms. This paper draws from a variety of data including the accounts of key stakeholders (First Nation Chief, Elders, parents, students and Education Manager; Local Teachers and Principal; Government Leader and Curriculum Director) in describing the processes contributing to this change and the tensions that remain, ultimately at the classroom level.

Theoretical framework: This area of research is informed by two major categories of thought - culturally responsive teaching and critical pedagogy. Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them (Gay, 2000; Stephens, 2003). As suggested by Gay (2000) culturally responsive teachers teach to and through the strength of their students. The underlying premise of culture-based education is that the educational experiences provided for children *should* reflect, validate, and promote their culture and language. These experiences should be reflected not only in the management and operation of schools but also in the curricula and programs implemented and pedagogies used. It assumes that students come to school with a whole set of practices, beliefs, skills, and understandings formed from their experience in their world, and that the role of the school is not to ignore or replace these understandings and skills, but to recognize the teaching practices and understandings within the cultural context and affirm these in formal classroom settings (Aikenhead, 2010; Stephens, 2003; Watt-Cloutier, 2000). This advocacy for culturally responsive teaching has long been held in northern Canadian schools. As Stairs (1995) has asserted, northern students' lack of educational success can be attributed to, to a greater degree, the inability of northern schools to meet the learning needs of their Indigenous citizens through the experiences offered and pedagogies used in classrooms. She asserted that this failure includes not only resource and language materials appropriate for each context, but also, more importantly, the culturally located pedagogy that moves beyond the *what* of classrooms to the *how* of classrooms. Stairs identified in her ethnographic research that the formal learning of northern schools is radically different from the informal learning of home culture and that successful classrooms are likely to reflect these home practices. These claims have been advocated for but tragically ignored for decades in Indigenous settings (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2010). Culturally responsive teaching is commonly referred to as one form of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is defined as an educational movement, guided by passion and principle, 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 classroom pedagogies perceived to influence students' 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) 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.

Methods, techniques, or modes of inquiry: The methodology used in this research inquiry is the case study. Using multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data the study endeavours to understand and explain a phenomenon; the processes influencing the establishment of culture-based education programs at the school and classroom level in a First Nation community. The study strives towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action within a social system, a school (Sjoberg, Williams, Vaughan, & Sjoberg , 1991). The unit of analysis in this case study is the dominant players that have impacted on the classroom practices at the school level; the Chief, eldership, superintendent, principal, teachers, students, and community members, especially parents. Drawing upon multiple sources of information, this case study includes a multi-perspective analysis drawing themes from the relevant players and the interaction among them. Although the changes in the First Nation that have occurred at the classroom level and associated changes on students' learning have been well-documented more recently in the educational literature (Authors, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015), no account has been provided of the processes contributing to these changes through the personal stories of those involved. For this reason this study seeks to present from the narrative accounts of those involved an understanding of the processes and principles involved.

Data Sources: The study employs a variety of data sources to improve the confirmability and transferability in the findings. The data sources include (1) foundational documents that provide insight to the chronology of the constitutional processes associated with SGA development and (2) personal accounts from 68 individuals (51 of whom are First Nation) who have had some participation in the SGA process over the past three decades. The personal accounts are provided emanating from individual and group interviews conducted over a three year period commencing in August 2009. The first interviews in 2009 focused on aspirations for education and aspirations for classroom practice. In the semi-structured interviews, we asked questions that focused on individuals identifying (a) participants aspirations for education, (b) perceptions of factors that were likely to lead or inhibit such aspirations becoming reality; (c) teaching and learning experiences they had had within informal contexts, such as in their homes or in the community, (b) teaching and learning experiences that people had had within more formal contexts, such as in school, and, in these experiences describing, (c) what their teachers (both informal and formal) did to help them to learn, (d) what was happening when they were learning best both in informal and informal settings, (e) what they would change about their teachers' teaching to assist them in their learning, and (f) teachers of good consequence and the characteristics of these teachers, both

in informal and informal settings. In the second set of interviews conducted in late 2014 and early 2015, the interviews focused on understanding the processes that had contributed to the changes and tensions associated with seeing aspirations actualised. In all cases, the interviews were 'a chat' (Bishop and Glynn, 1999) based upon the need for collaboration between researchers and researched to construct the final story as evidenced in the vignettes and themes to be presented in a subsequent section. All conversations and interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed and verified or adjusted as necessary by participants.

Results: The results from the two periods of interviews provide significant information to the changes occurring in educational practice, especially pedagogically at the classroom level. As mentioned, our other published accounts provide detail regarding the nature of the teaching practices that the community has sought to see enacted and the effect these enacted practices have had on student learning and engagement. Broader than this, this paper focuses on the themes identified as those that have contributed to these changes. Evident in the data analysis, is the critical importance to the change experienced was the need to establish a 'shared vision' amongst stakeholders in the development process. Of particular importance to the changes has been the renewed commitment of community parents to reinvest in education and schooling, despite their own stories of hurt and humiliation from their own schooling encounters, especially as a result of their residential school experience.

Drawing from the Kaupapa Maori framework, we identify the following principles as crucial for contributing to the changes that have occurred in classroom practice responsive to a community's aspirations for education. These include:

1. The principle of self-determination or relative autonomy. The impetus for change, especially in SGA development is grounded in 'conscientization' or 'consciousness-raising' illustrating a reawakening of Aboriginal imagination that has too often been stifled and diminished by colonization processes. The issue here, as delineated by Kaupapa Maori Theory is the realized need by Aboriginal people to have increased 'control over one's own life and cultural well-being' (Smith, 2003) and to make choices and decisions that reflect their cultural, political, economic and social preferences.
2. The principle of validating and legitimating cultural aspirations and identity. The issue here is the increased attention to supporting the maintenance of First Nation culture and identity and, by so doing, fostering the recommitment of First Nation parents.
3. The principle of incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy. The issue here is that the teaching and learning settings and practices are able to effectively connect with the life experiences and cultural backgrounds of First Nation communities.
4. The principle of mediating socio-economic and home difficulties through recognizing schooling as a priority. The issue here is that improvement in socio-economic being is a promoted by improvement in educational success.
5. The principle of incorporating cultural structures which emphasize the collective rather than the individual. The issue here is that the extended family (clan) of the child provides a collective and supportive structure to alleviate home difficulties.

Despite the positive outcomes experienced by the First Nation, the research also illuminates ongoing tensions within education; for example, the practice and priority of classroom decision-making continues to establish the teacher, who is usually non First-Nation, as authority. 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's colonial history. Ultimately, what will be the re-definition of curriculum? The commentary indicates such redefinition is successfully 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 all students. It is apparent that at the *why* level, which ultimately challenges the philosophical reason for education and the purpose of schooling is still being outworked, primarily due to the resolute attention to this imperative by several stakeholder. As Friere (1997) asserts, "they must perceive the reality critically… and this must become the motivating force for liberating action" (p. 34).

Scholarly significance of the study or work: The information presented in this study as presented by the stakeholders makes evident the voiced concerns of a YFN community, concerns that reflect a critical awareness of the education and schooling process of their community, an experience most Indigenous peoples have faced and continue to experience. Responding to these voiced concerns became the imperative for the school involved. We believe that the oral accounts that will be presented challenge many of the fundamental structures, practices and content of Yukon education and education in general. As well, it provides testament to the principles that are likely integral for fostering such change and, thus, of encouragement to other communities working towards similar outcomes. The Chief and Council asserted: "Listen and hear what we are saying". We anticipate that the community's voice and the principles and processes identified and employed in this process of change will draw into question the protocols of mainstream schools and classrooms and, in response, promote a dynamic and synergistic relationship between home and community culture and school culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This questioning ultimately and purposely "problematizes" teaching, upsets the orthodoxy of classrooms, and encourages teachers to ask about the nature of student and teacher relationship, their teaching, the curriculum, and schooling (Ladson-Billings, 1995, Gay, 2000). By creating this disequilibrium, educators are pushed to seek resolution of these issues to move their classrooms to become more *culturally* responsive as they employ a culturally preferred pedagogy. Change towards culturally responsive teaching based upon adjusted beliefs and practices does have consequence on student learning and, potentially, more significantly, a community because of the confirmatory nature of responding to the voiced concerns of the community involved.

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