

Education in the Circumpolar North: Mapping the landscape

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The Morning Watch was first published through the Faculty of Education at Memorial University in 1973 as a journal to highlight the “awakening consciousness of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador” (Gushue, 1977, iv). Opened in 1925 as a teacher education college, Memorial remains the only university in the province, with 10 teaching and learning facilities, over 19,000 students, and 5,200 faculty and staff from more than 115 countries¹. Memorial University now formally acknowledges the island of Newfoundland as the ancestral homelands of the Mi’kmaq and Beothuk, and recognizes the Inuit of Nunatsiavut and NunatuKavut and the Innu of Nitassinan and their ancestors as the original people of Labrador. Like the university, *The Morning Watch* began as a voice specifically for the teachers of Newfoundland and Labrador, but shifting geographies, climate change, and globalism makes the connection to history, the world, and to our Arctic partners, now much more significant. This special edition celebrates those connections by focussing on teacher education in the circumpolar north.

The Circumpolar North

Life in the circumpolar north is shifting rapidly. The Arctic is warming at about three times the global average rate². Climate change and increased accessibility is seriously affecting the land, biodiversity, cultures, and traditions of the Arctic³. The transformative role of climate change, environmental protection and response, safe regional transportation, and search and rescue capabilities are all emerging problems as commercial interest and activity in the Arctic increases⁴. Further, food insecurity, access to health care, housing, reliable infrastructure, as well as colonial legacies and

¹ Memorial University Campuses. <https://www.mun.ca/main/campuses.php>

² Canada's Changing Climate Report (Government of Canada, 2019), pp. 84, 85, 118, 125, 434.

³ Government of Canada (2019). Canada's Northern and Arctic Policy Framework <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1560523306861/1560523330587>

⁴ Government of Canada (2019) The Northern Policy Framework <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1560523306861/1560523330587>

the deep and ongoing impact on Indigenous⁵ people of the residential school experience, continue to impact people living in the north⁶.

People's understanding of what "north" means differs based on variables such as political boundaries, geographic features like tree line or permafrost, proximity to identified lines of latitude such as the Arctic Circle or, in Canada, the 60th parallel. Communities in the north are often geographically distant from southern central governments that control legislation and funding for services⁷. The north is also where mega-projects such as mineral extraction⁸ and hydro-electric generation⁹ take place - massive projects operating where the land is vast and the population is minimal. Living in the north also involves long cold nights with little movement in winter and long warm days filled with activities that celebrate the light in summer. It can also include witnessing the rhythm of the planet and watching the night sky light up with the aurora borealis, or smelling the snow in the clouds in the fall and the pungent rot of leaves mingling with fresh pine in the melt of spring. It can involve the throaty caw of a raven cutting through a noiselessness that thrums it is so quiet – and it can be "hiraeth," the "place where my soul feels fully alive and expansive," similar to what Gulla teaches us about life and our relationship to nature and time in the northern Scottish islands of Orkney and Shetland (p. 146).

Recognizing the unique circumstances of the north, in 1996 the Arctic Council was created to promote regular consultation and cooperative activities to address Arctic issues and ensure full consultation with the Indigenous peoples and other inhabitants of the Arctic¹⁰. The council is comprised of the eight Arctic states: Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark (which includes the autonomous constituent countries of Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States. The Council also includes six Indigenous organizations as Permanent Participants. They include the Aluet International Association (Russian and U.S. constituents), the Arctic Athabaskan Council (Canadian and U.S. constituents), the Gwich'in Council International (Canadian and U.S. constituents), the Inuit Circumpolar Council (Canadian, Greenlandic, Russian, and U.S. constituents), the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (Russian

⁵ The term Indigenous is used to refer to the First Peoples of any region around the world.

⁶ Government of Canada (2019) The Northern Policy Framework <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1560523306861/1560523330587>

⁷ Godfrey Anderson, J. & Lane, J. (2021). Pigiassilluta oKalagiamik: Culturally Relevant Assessment in Nunatsiavut. *Études Inuit Studies*. In press.

⁸ CBC (Feb 17, 2021). Nunavut mine says it's not allowed to harm Inuit harvesting <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/nunavut-mine-says-it-s-not-allowed-to-harm-inuit-harvesting-1.5916186>

⁹ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (2020). Muskrat Falls – A Misguided Project. <https://www.gov.nl.ca/iet/muskrat-falls-a-misguided-project/>. See also, CBC (Feb 25, 2021) Site C dam budget nearly doubles to \$16B, but B.C. NDP forging on with megaproject. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/site-c-announcement-friday-1.5928719>

¹⁰ Government of Canada. Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council (Ottawa, 1996). https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/arctic-arctique/declaration_ac-declaration_ca.aspx?lang=eng

constituents), and the Saami Council (Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Russian constituents). The Arctic Council recognizes the need for the preservation and development of social structures, cultural traditions, languages and means of subsistence.

Former Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Sheila Watt Cloutier (2010) writes that character is built by the Arctic environment and the skills required to survive there. Peoples of the Arctic have experienced rapid and often traumatic social change and now environmental change. Watt Cloutier (2010) maintains education has a key role to play in responding to climate change, the impacts of which are being witnessed most noticeably across the north.

We're starting to see that the holistic way in which we have taught our children is really the way that we need to continue if we want our children to survive the modern world because when you are taught the kind of patience and the right judgement and how not to be impulsive and how to be bold under pressure and how to withstand stress out on the land, then that gets integrated into one's ability to withstand all of these stresses in the modern world. (p. 165)

This special issue of the Morning Watch offers a look at education across the Arctic with voices of teacher educators from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Faroe Islands, Alaska, Labrador (Canada), and Nunavut (Canada). Through its current partnerships with the Nunavut Teacher Education Program (Nunavut Arctic College), the Thematic Network on Teacher Education for Social Justice and Diversity (University of the Arctic), and the Verdde Network (University of the Arctic), the Faculty of Education is connected with teacher educators across the circumpolar north. Our relationships are written throughout and between the lines of the papers of this special edition.

Education in the Circumpolar North

In writing about education across northern regions, the authors share their research, centring the significance of place-based pedagogies in learning and mental well-being, the importance of teacher education in preparing teachers for their role with northern children, and the challenge of integrating traditional Indigenous knowledges with the demands of globalization.

At the heart of all of the papers in this special edition is relationships – the interrelationships between people and place, culture and identity, and educators and students. Scholar Sean *Asiqtuq* Topkok and Elder Hannah *Paniyarluk* Loon share an Alaskan research project aimed at blending Iñupiaq and Western knowledge to create school learning resources. The researchers emphasize the importance of humility when meeting with Elders and knowledge holders for this work. Like an animal that gives itself to a hunter, the researchers engaged in a process whereby traditional

knowledge presented itself for the project. Thus, they teach about the Iñupiat cultural protocols that are required in such education work.

The importance of social relationships, within learning communities imbued with Sámi cultural values, are described by Anne-Mette Bjøru and Anne Randi Solbakken in their article on the Sámi approach to inclusive education. They write: “The thought that all humans develop best within a shared community is the very foundation for the Sámi” (p. 22). These learning environments are modelled on family relational networks whereby students refer to one another as school-sisters and school-brothers, and teachers recognize their roles as being like god-parents. Within these learning environments, the focus is on nurturing children’s abilities and strengths in order for them to become independent.

Mary Simon, Chair of the National Committee on Inuit Education Strategy, writes of the importance of improving educational outcomes for Inuit children so they can participate in the prosperity of Canada (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2011). The National Inuit Education Strategy includes a focus on self-determination in education, an Inuit-centered curriculum and literacy in an Inuit language. The vision of Inuit education was further examined in 2017, renewing the “calls for Inuit control of a truly Inuit education system in which Inuit ways of knowing, being, and doing are reflected and celebrated, in which Inuit act as leaders, and in which Inuit students succeed” (ITK, p. 5). In describing the Certificate in Educational Leadership in Nunavut (CELN), Snow et. al. explain the ways in which the program is grounded in Inuit values of educational leadership and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit.

Teacher education, Indigenous language education, and culturally sustaining pedagogies are all important aspects of connecting culture, land, and education. Jonna Kangas and Heidi Harju-Luukkainen describe the Finnish educare model of early childhood teacher education that examines how teacher education builds pedagogical competences for teachers to think and act critically but also the ways in which teachers must be future-oriented through their professional development.

In their article on equity and social justice in Sámi education, Pigga Keskitalo and Erika Katjaana Sarivaara examine the role of teachers in cultural revitalization and self-determination through the teaching strategies used for Indigenous language teaching. A poem by Kalpana Vijayarathan highlights the importance of education in the efforts for social justice and calls for “dignity, value and respect for peoples all.” Sylvia Moore, Elizabeth Yeoman, and Katie Flood give a history of teacher education in Labrador, Canada, which began in order to provide teacher education courses to Indigenous language speakers. This training gave graduates the opportunity to teach their Indigenous languages or work as teaching assistants in local schools.

Finally, relationship is also a prominent theme in the all the authors’ deep connection to the land, which echoes throughout knowledge generation and sharing. Place-based learning, write Breanne Card and Anne Burke, “... fosters a strong sense of self, place and community, and takes on a self-directed learning style that increases

the chances of involvement, ownership, and success...” (p. 125). The centrality of land is also evident in Ola Andersen’s reflection on the land-based experiences of students in the spring of 2020 when the school in Cartwright, Labrador closed due to the global pandemic. In addition to the skills learned by the children, she observed the physical and mental health benefits that the land offered and the relationship building opportunities for children as families travelled together on the land.

In any discussion of the north we believe it is right to give voice and allow nature the final word. Amanda Gulla gives a glimpse into that power and beauty on the Orkney and Shetland Islands. While not directly related to education in the north, relationship with the land is at the heart of Gulla’s inquiry into finding a place where one’s soul feels alive. Her poetry represents the complex relationship of humans with the often unforgiving landscapes of the north.

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