INTEGRATING INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES INTO TEACHER EDUCATION IN ALBERTA

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Anti-Indigenous racism is the result of a lack of knowledge about Indigenous peoples according to Senator Murray Sinclair (Sinclair, 2019). Teacher education is one of the most powerful ways to combat racism towards Indigenous peoples as it impacts not only pre-service teachers but in-service teachers, their students, and their families. Alberta's new Teaching Quality Standard was released in 2018 (TQS, 2020) and requires all Alberta teachers to possess and apply a foundational knowledge of Indigenous peoples. The article reports on the preliminary findings of a study examining how teacher education institutions in Alberta are integrating Indigenous perspectives into their programming.

Positioning

Patricia Danyluk (PhD) is a settler, who grew up in northern Manitoba and has worked on and with Indigenous communities in Manitoba, Alberta and Ontario. Her research focuses on teacher education and reconciliation. Maureen Plante (MSc student) is Iroquois Cree/Métis and grew up on Treaty 6 territory. Her work is centered around Indigenous mental health. Samara Wessel (MSc student) is a settler, who grew up in the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia. Her research is focused on how non-Indigenous counsellors can provide culturally appropriate services to Indigenous clients.

Context

Provincial governments, post-secondary institutions and schools are all called upon by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission's* (TRC; 2015) 94 Calls to Action. Calls to Action, 62 and 63 specify that post-secondary institutions must "educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms" (TRC, 2015, p. 11) and provide the necessary funding to post-secondary schools to support the education of teachers. Provincial governments are also called upon to develop and implement Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum and learning resources on "Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools" (p. 11). In Alberta the new *Teaching Quality Standard* (*TQS*; Alberta Education, 2020) describes the professional expectations for all Alberta teachers. As one of six competencies identified in the *TQS*, the fifth competency states "A teacher develops and applies foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students" (TQS, 2020, p. 7). While both teachers (Scott & Gani, 2018) and post-secondary institutions (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017) have been working towards integrating Indigenous

perspectives into their programs long before the new TQS (2020), the inclusion of TQS number five placed increased emphasis on the integration.

Between 2018 and 2020, Alberta's teacher education programs came together to examine field experience and assessment (2018-2020) in the content of the new TQS (2018). The findings of this research pointed to the need for teacher education programs to consider how Indigenous perspectives were being integrated in their programs (Burns et al., 2022). Data from the field experience study revealed that faculty, mentor teachers and schools were working to integrate Indigenous perspectives and being exposed to an abundance of new resources (Burns, et al., 2022) however, there was a fear of doing the wrong thing and accidentally being disrespectful (Burns et al., 2022). This finding is supported by the research of Evans et al. (2020) which demonstrated a gap between training about Indigenous perspectives and integration in the classroom. Similarly, (McDermott et al., 2020) suggested the fear of making mistakes holds educators back from engaging with Indigenous epistemologies, histories, pedagogies, and protocols.

In 2020, ten teacher education institutions from across Alberta came together to examine: how their programs were taking up the work of antiracism by integrating Indigenous perspectives, the challenges and success of the integration and how teacher education programs could work more closely with schools to combat racism and further this integration. The research team consists of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty from a variety of teacher education institutions across Alberta. This article reports on the preliminary findings of this research. This research is funded through a SSHRC Insight Grant, and the outcomes will include a series of ten podcasts that share how both non-Indigenous and Indigenous teachers and faculty are taking up this work in their classrooms.

Literature Review

One of the most powerful ways in which racism towards Indigenous peoples is combatted is through the integration of Indigenous perspectives into the classroom (Hughes-Adams & Grass, 2016). Racism towards Indigenous peoples in Canada is rooted in a lack of education about Indigenous peoples (Centre for Research and Information on Canada, 2004). Similarly, Pedersen et al. (2011) suggested that increased education about marginalized groups reduces racism. However, reducing racism has posed a challenge in Canada and Alberta as it is pervasive at institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels (Lashta et al., 2016). In Canada, Indigenous people are disproportionately affected by acts of racism (Stelikia, 2020) which affects Indigenous learners (Bailey, 2016; Prete, 2021).

Given that the Indigenous population is the fastest growing population in Canada (Alberta Health Services, 2022) and, in Alberta, it is growing twice as fast as the non-Indigenous population (Lorenz, 2017), the commitment to the integration of Indigenous perspectives in education is imperative. Within Alberta alone, there are approximately 220,700 self-identifying Indigenous people, 45 First Nations and 140 reserves across Treaty 6, 7, and 8 (Alberta Health Services, 2022), with eight main First Nations language groups, including Dene, Dunne-za, Dene Tha, Plains and Woodland Cree, Nakoda, Blackfoot Confederacy, Tsuut'ina, and Nakoda (Alberta Health Services, 2020). Alberta is also home to the largest Métis population in Canada with more than 114,000 people identifying as Métis (Alberta Government, 2022).

Indigenous faculty often play important roles in education as they familiarize students with Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being, the history of colonization, and when Indigenous people and allies come together to create meaningful learning opportunities for everyone (Morcom & Freeman, 2018). In schools, Indigenous teachers in schools are key to building a strong foundation for the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives into the classroom (Morcom & Freeman, 2018).

Despite the TRC Calls to Action (2015) for universities and all levels of government to increase Indigenous staff, Indigenous academics continue to be under-represented, especially in senior representation (Povey et al., 2022). A 2019 survey of post-secondary faculty and researchers reported that First Nations, Metis, and Inuit faculty and researchers accounted for 1.9% of academic community respondents, and only 21% of Indigenous faculty were tenured compared to 37% of non-Indigenous faculty (Statistics Canada, 2019). Moreover, since 2018, Alberta's post-secondary sector has seen a budget reduction of 18.8% (Adkin, 2022). Budget cuts have forced universities, colleges, and technical institutes across the province to lay-off thousands of employees, increase the workload of remaining staff, and discontinue teaching contracts and academic programs (Adkin, 2022). Since Indigenous faculty members are under-represented in academia, they are often asked to take on additional service work on top of their regular teaching and research obligations (Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). The additional work, often referred to as "invisible labour" (Brennan et al., 2021), includes a commitment to filling representation gaps on committees, supporting equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives, as well as mentoring faculty and students (Brennan et al., 2021), which oftenleads to high burnout rates for Indigenous faculty members (Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). For racialized Indigenous faculty members–who already experience increased work demands, including navigating institutionalized whiteness, and contemplate leaving academia (Mohamed & Beagan, 2019)– budget cuts may lead to further overtaxing. Additionally, since the United Conservative Party (UCP) took power in Alberta in 2019, there has been a decrease in Indigenous public appointees (13% New Democratic Party appointees compared to 3% UCP appointees) sitting on Alberta's public post-secondary education institutions boards between April 2019 and March 2021 (Adkin, 2022). The increased demands and the under-representation of Indigenous faculty highlight the importance for non-Indigenous scholars to share in the responsibility of Indigenizing the educational system.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of antiracism focuses on people of colour yet fails to recognize that all Canadians live on land that was appropriated from Indigenous peoples. For this reason, anti-racism theory is ill-suited for the examination of racism towards Indigenous peoples in Canada (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). Racism toward Indigenous peoples takes many forms including negative stereotypes, the dominance of Western knowledge systems, overt aggressions, subtle discrimination, structural inequities, and social exclusion (Reading, 2014). Racism in Canada is systemic in that it has severe consequences including an imbalance of power and resources which negatively impact Indigenous peoples and extend through all levels of society resulting in limited healthy food choices, inadequate living conditions and substandard health care for Indigenous peoples (Leyland, et al., 2016).

This research adopts critical race theory as a theoretical framework. Critical race theory (CRT) argues against a multicultural perspective which suggests that we are all immigrants (Zamundio et al., 2010). As the original inhabitants of this land, Indigenous peoples are clearly not immigrants and therefore a multicultural approach does not fit. Critical race theory acknowledges that racism is systemic and wide ranging (Gillborn, 2006) and so deeply enmeshed in the fabric of our society that we fail to notice it when it occurs. This lack of acknowledgement is something we must continually struggle against (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2016). Senator Murray Sinclair counseled that Canadians must understand the history of Indigenous peoples as a necessary step in combatting anti-Indigenous racism (Sinclair, 2019).

Methodology

In coming together to examine how Indigenous perspectives are being taken up in teacher education and in schools, the researchers decided that each program would be considered a case. As there were ten teacher education programs participating in the research, collective case study was chosen as a methodology. Collective case study allows researchers to examine multiple cases to provide insight into the issue (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995, 2006). Following the identification of the need for teacher education programs to examine how Indigenous perspectives were being integrated in their programs (Burns et al., 2022) the researchers met to draft a survey. The survey was designed to provide a more thorough understanding of how teacher education programs in Alberta were integrating Indigenous perspectives into the programs and to identify challenges and successes. The survey also provided an opportunity to generate ideas on how teacher education programs might work with schools to further integration and to combat anti-Indigenous racism.

Researchers from each of the institutions worked with leadership and faculty responsible for Indigenous content in each of their programs to complete the survey. In programs where multiple individuals were responsible for the integration of Indigenous perspectives in the program, the survey was completed jointly with input from multiple individuals including Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty. To ensure that the results of the study represented teacher education programs from across Alberta, the research team consisted of small to large programs in both urban and rural settings. Each institution analyzed their data separately and the principal investigator worked alongside research assistants to conduct an analysis of the data as a whole.

The research was triangulated by revisiting the outcomes of the original study on field experience assessment and the TQS in Alberta (Burns, et al., 2022) along with the survey results and a collaborative data analysis event where the researchers met to discuss the findings from the lens of their specific program and the results as a whole.

Findings

In January 2022, the ten institutions came together to discuss the findings and to consider how they might work collaboratively to combat racism towards Indigenous peoples through the integration of Indigenous perspectives in each of their programs. A collaborative data analysis event was held in September 2022 during which researchers from each of the institutions examined data from survey findings and considered strengths and areas in which their program

might further integrate Indigenous perspectives. The collaborative data analysis event revealed an authentic commitment on behalf of the ten institutions to deepen the integration of Indigenous perspectives in their programming and an interest in further collaboration through shared professional development. Discussions pointed to the role of the practicum in connecting the knowledge pre-service teachers acquire through their programs to the classrooms in which they complete practicum.

In May 2022, we presented the preliminary findings from the survey of teacher education institutions in Alberta at the University of Calgary Conference on Post-Secondary Learning and Teaching. The finding of the survey indicated that all teacher education programs were incorporating Indigenous perspectives into programming with content as the primary method of integration. Content refers to historical information including education policy, information on the Residential School system and Treaties, as well as Indigenous literature. Eighty percent of the institutions indicated they integrated Indigenous perspectives through process or pedagogies such as land-based learning, talking circles and or storytelling and 70% reported they used products or student assignments such as lesson plans to further integration. Eighty percent of the institutions reported that workshops were used to provide students with additional opportunities to learn more about Indigenous perspectives and thirty percent of the intuitions indicated they also drew upon conferences to further the integration. Eighty percent of the institutions mentioned they drew upon other resources including experiential learning, Truth and Reconciliation Day and guest speakers to further the integration. All the teacher education programs that Indigenous faculty were involved in the design of courses with Indigenous content, pedagogies, or products. There was a shared acknowledgement of the disproportionate burden this work rests upon Indigenous faculty and Elders/Knowledge Keepers to continually lead this work. However, the number of Indigenous faculty ranged from a high of five to a low of one sessional faculty member.

Nine of the ten teacher education programs reported they had experienced success with the integration of Indigenous programming including incorporation into the practicum, land-based learning and by connecting with Indigenous Elders/Knowledge Keepers and communities. One of the best indicators of success was positive feedback from schools based on experiences with graduates and practicum students. Nine of the ten programs reported they had experienced challenges with the integration of Indigenous perspectives including limited funding available to support activities and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on connecting with Indigenous communities. Nine of the ten programs reported they had plans to deepen the level of integration and work more closely with schools to further the integration.

Discussion

The results of this research, at present, demonstrate a genuine commitment on behalf of Alberta teacher education programs to furthering the integration of Indigenous perspectives in a respectful manner. Yet, there continues to be some confusion regarding how this can be done in an authentic manner that does not place an additional burden upon Indigenous faculty, Elders and Knowledge Keepers to continually lead this work. Budget cuts to the post-secondary sector (Adkin, 2022) have placed additional stressors on institutions as they work to maintain their commitment to Indigenizing and to deepen levels of integration. For non-Indigenous faculty and teachers there is still a real fear of doing the wrong thing and unintendedly being seen as

disrespectful (Burns et al., 2022). This research points to a scarcity of Indigenous faculty in teacher education programs, especially considering the reality that of the six professional expectations identified in the new TQS (2020), one focuses entirely on possessing and applying knowledge of Indigenous peoples.

While there are an abundance of new resources available to faculty and teachers to draw upon to integrate Indigenous perspectives, there appears to be a gap between training about Indigenous perspectives and integration in the classroom (Evans et al., 2020). Programs are experiencing success in integrating Indigenous perspectives into their programming with one of the strongest indicators of success being positive feedback from schools on graduate and pre-service teachers' knowledge of Indigenous content, processes and pedagogies and their ability to apply this knowledge in their teaching. Still, challenges continue with limited funding to support integration and the impact of the pandemic on preventing programs from working directly with Indigenous Elders and communities.

Conclusion

Education remains the best way to combat racism towards Indigenous peoples because of its far-reaching impact. Talking about racism in class is difficult even for the most seasoned educator. However, such discussions are essential to the process of decolonization as it is only by unpacking the intentional, repeated actions taken to colonize Indigenous peoples that we will understand how racism is systemic and continues to permeate our thinking both consciously and unconsciously. By integrating this knowledge into teacher education, we impact not only pre-service teachers but in-service teachers, their students, and families.

While there has been progress in the integration of Indigenous perspectives into teacher education programs in Alberta, moving forward programs must deepen that level of integration by connecting with schools. The next step in this research project is to inquire into how Alberta teachers are taking up the work on combatting racism towards Indigenous peoples through the integration of Indigenous perspectives in their teaching. Instead of producing more resources, this project will engage teachers and faculty in telling the story of how they are taking up this work through a series of ten podcasts.

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