

# **An Ethical Space for Dialogue about Difficult History: Fostering Critical Thinking Amongst Students in Canada's Northwest Territories & Nunavut**

Sarah Daitch

*The potential for developing human capital in the North rests on improved education outcomes for secondary school students. As part of Northwest Territories and Nunavut education systems' respective aims towards improved results, new curriculum materials are being developed in the North. One aim for these materials is to overcome persistent inequalities in educational achievement outcomes in the Canadian North. The territorial education departments developed a mandatory curriculum module regarding the history and legacy of the Canadian governments' former policies of assimilation, and forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families to residential schools. This curriculum and accompanying resource module was piloted in high schools during the 2012-2013 academic year. This article presents a study conducted in collaboration with the territorial departments of education in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, evaluating the curriculum initiative. It examines how Northern Canadian youth connect difficult history with their identity, and become capable of and committed to community and civic engagement in their own lives. Because it is a region undergoing rapid development and governance changes, fostering critical citizenship amongst students is vital. Compassionate students who can think critically will be positioned to improve the Canadian North, and the wider circumpolar Arctic.*

## **Introduction: Improving Education in a Transforming Environment**

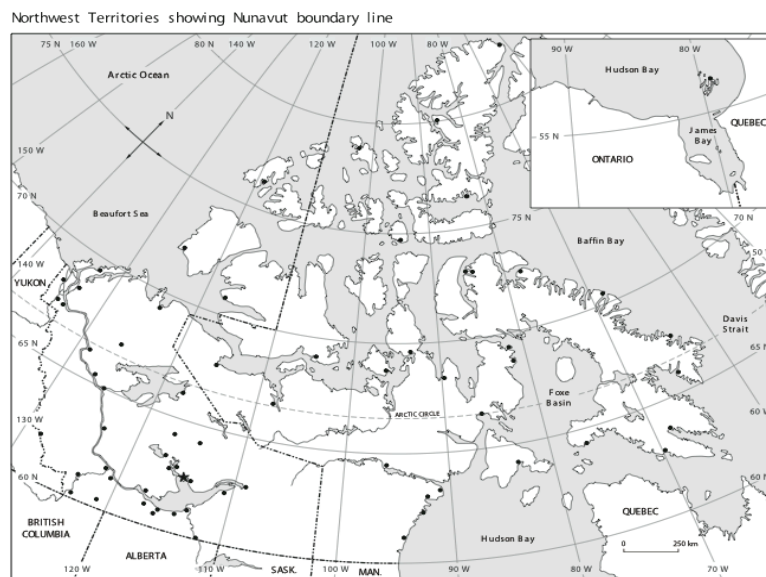
In Canada's Northwest Territories (NWT) and Nunavut, there is a renewed focus on improving secondary and post-secondary education outcomes. These aim towards bridging the notable gap in education achievements with the rest of Canada, and with other circumpolar regions.<sup>1</sup> In Nunavut, the need for improvement in education was a central issue in the October 2013 election (Kennedy Dalseg 2014). The Government of the Northwest Territories announced its Aboriginal Student Achievement Education Plan in 2011, and in 2012, the NWT Education Renewal and Innovation Initiative was launched. *The Education Renewal and Innovation Framework: Directions for Change* was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013, outlining the commitments of the renewal initiative (GNWT 2013). Both territories seek to examine the

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education system and improve outcomes, seeking to increase both graduation rates and the quality of secondary education through building community relationships, good health and a strong sense of identity. The challenge is to strike a balance between educating healthy, capable and empowered citizens who can make informed choices about their individual and collective futures, and training the future labor force. Establishing this balance is even more difficult given labor market pressures from a growing resource and mining sector (Kennedy Dalseg 2014).

**Figure 1:** Map of Northwest Territories and Nunavut, site of territorial pilot research on new education module



It is against this backdrop that the territorial education departments in Nunavut and the NWT are implementing new curriculum materials intended to better prepare students to face these emerging pressures and opportunities. This paper will focus on the pilot of one new module of curriculum developed collaboratively by the NWT and Nunavut for Grade 10 students. For two years, students in the NWT and Nunavut have been learning about the history and legacy of Canada's assimilation policies and residential schools. The purpose of this paper is to highlight how learning from the new module has developed students' skills in critical thinking, citizenship, and community engagement in the two territories.

### *From "Federal Shackles" to a Globalized Arctic: The Need for Enhanced Human Capital*

On June 5, 2013, in the NWT's Legislative Assembly, elected members voted on their Devolution agreement, a motion allowing the territory to take on new authorities for decision making for land, water, and resources from Canada's federal government for the first time since confederation. Finance Minister Michael Miltenberger addressed the assembly, "we stand here burdened and bowed by the very many federal shackles that constrain us. We look at the agreement that we have negotiated, that will get us almost shackle-free. Will we be better off tomorrow?... The answer is unequivocally yes," (GNWT Hansard, June 5, 2013: 2854).

As Miltenberger alludes to in his speech to the Assembly, historically, Canada's Arctic and sub-Arctic territories have been the site of both economic exploitation and social incursion driven by

Southern Canada. Over the last century and a half, these incursions wrought devastation on Northern Indigenous peoples. Exposed to newcomers, northerners suffered epidemics of influenza and tuberculosis (Canada RCAP 1996). As brought to light by the Qikṭani Truth Commission's work and report, Inuit sled dogs were systemically slaughtered by RCMP officers, limiting hunters' ability to travel and harvest on the land; communities including Grise Fiord were established as the result of ill-considered High Arctic relocation policies from the federal government (2010). The legacy of the residential school system in the Canadian North has far reaching consequences, shaping how communities today relate to the contemporary territorial education system (Canada RCAP 1996; TRC interim report 2012; Daitch 2013). As articulated in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples,

On one hand, the North is the part of Canada in which Aboriginal peoples have achieved the most in terms of political influence and institutions appropriate to their cultures and needs. On the other, the North itself is a region with little influence over its own destiny. Most of the levers of political and economic power continue to be held outside the North and, in some cases, outside Canada (1996, Ch. 6, vol. 4 para. 1).

Although the Royal Commission report was written in 1996, much of its description still applies to the territorial North today, particularly in a resource driven economy (Conference Board of Canada 2011). In spite of challenges, over the last three decades, northerners in all three territories have worked to exert autonomy within Canada through land claims, self-government and devolution agreements, (Irlbacher-Fox & Mills 2007). Massive resource potential and accompanying plans to develop the North as a resource frontier for Canada complicate this struggle towards autonomy, as rich mineral projections spark interest from around the world (Conference Board of Canada 2011; GNWT Mining Strategy 2013). History has taught us that rapid development will not automatically benefit northerners when the authority for decision-making lies in far removed locations. For example, researchers investigating the legacy of the Giant gold mine near Yellowknife reported that the communities of Ndilo and Dettah saw few benefits from the mine overall. In spite of experiencing limited benefit, due to the location near the mine, community members' harvesting territory and health were adversely affected by half a century of arsenic exposure. This outcome was a result of decisions that the community had little influence over, but had to live with (Sandlos and Keeling 2011).

An additional example of severe consequence from decisions taken far from the Arctic is thawing polar sea ice. The receding ice has serious implications for Canada's territorial north. The much hyped "Arctic race" for mineral riches has the potential to bring increased wealth to the North but also threatens resources essential to maintaining Indigenous livelihoods (Plouffe 2011; Allard & Lemay 2012).<sup>2</sup> As schooling improves (despite the need for more improvements) the next generation of Northerners will continue to increase participation in wage employment, be leaders of community and regional affairs, protect the environment and their cultural heritage, and participate in business (Allard & Lemay 2012). Young northerners are coming of age in an increasingly globalized and challenging environment. They require new skills to ensure that they are positioned to shape the future of the North. Understanding the lessons of difficult history in order to inform choices in the future is increasingly important for students in Northern Canada.

## **Background: The Legacy of Residential Schools and Assimilation Policies**

The century long residential school system perpetuated serious harm to many Indigenous families in Canada. Informed by racist policies designed to destroy Indigenous languages and culture, the residential schools were administered by the government of Canada and run by four denominations of churches. By the time the last school had closed, over 100,000 Indigenous children had been forcibly removed from their homes. Many students suffered systemic abuse and neglect (Cornthassel et al. 2009; Canada RCAP 1996). Residential School left a “record of cultural annihilation, chronic underfunding, poor management, systemic abuse, neglect and poor living conditions that had catastrophic impacts on the students who attended” (Milloy as cited in Regan 2010: 39). Tuberculosis death rates at the schools dwarfed those in the rest of Canada: by 1907, 24% of residential school students had died of TB, a mortality rate more than 100 times the national average (Sproule-Jones 1996).

Until recently, Canada’s record of assimilation policies and residential schools was rarely taught in classrooms. There is a significant disconnect between what survivors, researchers and historians have documented about Canada’s dark history of residential schools,<sup>3</sup> and what is taught in many classrooms across the country. As a result, Canadians’ knowledge on the topic is limited. A 2008 Environics Study demonstrated that only 7% of Canadians knew that the goals of the schools were assimilation into the mainstream society (as cited in Regan 2010: 42).

Of even greater concern is the gap in the knowledge of many Canadian school teachers about residential schools history. A teacher educator and researcher at York University reported that none of her several hundred teacher candidates had “substantive awareness of [the federal residential school apology] or of the long history of government denial of wrongdoing...” (Tarc 2011: 358). A step towards filling this gap in both teacher and student knowledge is through mandatory education of high school students in Canada’s public schools system, and enhanced teacher education on the topic. This is what the territorial education departments set out to do when they began developing their pilot education materials.

### ***Teaching Difficult History in Territorial Classrooms***

During 2012-2013 academic year, territorial education departments in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories concluded a yearlong pilot implementation of a new education module, *The Residential School System in Canada: Understanding the Past, Seeking Reconciliation, Building Hope for Tomorrow*. The module was the first of its kind to be mandatory, for all grade 10 students. It aims to teach the difficult history of the attempted assimilation of Indigenous students through residential schools and assimilation policies,<sup>4</sup> in order to nurture critical thinking and civic engagement amongst students, and to move into the future with “greater respect and understanding between First Peoples of Canada and everyone else who calls this land home” (*The Residential School System...* 2013: 5).

The module was created in consultation between territorial curriculum writers and former residential school students and territorial leaders. The curriculum writers asked, “What would you want your children or grand-children to know, think, and feel about residential schools when they have completed this module?” (Fowler & Willett 2014: 40). The leaders wanted students to understand that this is a complex story where happiness was found in unexpected places, and where tragedy occurred in places where those most vulnerable should have been safe. They

wanted their children to know the many truths. However, these leaders did not want their children to feel that they had to carry the burden of the past into their own futures. Instead, they recommended that students learn about what we should do now, and to think about the ways in which Canada can work towards becoming a healthy nation - a place where we can all be proud of who we are and where we come from (Fowler & Willett 2014).

The resulting teaching and learning resource materials were designed with this guidance in mind, and explains the materials' structure, following twelve learning activities through an 'arc.' Activity 1 begins by exploring how young children demonstrated independence and strength before the introduction of residential schools. The activities in the middle section of the arc explore the darker times when many colonial policies and practices at residential schools attempted to destroy people's sense of identity. In the final activities, the arc moves towards healing relationships, with the goal of returning to that original place of independence and strength.

The Nunavut and NWT approach to engaging its students with difficult history relies on a combination of storytelling, critical and social awareness pedagogies. The territories' residential schools module uses both conflictual content, which is curricular material that presents multiple perspectives on a political or social issue, and conflictual pedagogy, which is an instructional approach that supports and encourages the student expression of ideas (Avery & Hahn 2004). For example, the teacher's guide explains, "The purpose here is for students to discuss reconciliation...to think critically about these processes, and to consider their own role in them (*The Residential School System in Canada* 2013: 5).

In Activity 3, students watch video footage of the federal apology, read about and discuss responses to it, practicing group consensus and decision making skills. Students examine the history of residential schools in Activities 4-7, evaluating key policies and perspectives that established the schools' framework. Activity 4 assigned students a creative project to demonstrate personal understanding of the consequences of residential schools on contemporary communities (*Residential School System...* 2013).

An example of the module's creative approach to student learning is demonstrated through the wall mounted banner timeline used in Activity 5. The banner displayed the history of colonial and assimilation policies in classrooms. Activity 5's objective is for students to apply "critical thinking skills to analyze and deconstruct these policies from a historical perspective," (*Residential School System in Canada...*2013: 68). Students walked through the timeline, recording new vocabulary on a sticky note, and noting what surprised them. Though students found this activity quite challenging, the enactment of a walk through history is a recognized tool of peace building work. It can invite participation to align sensory experience of walking to explore and discover contested worldviews and identities (Arai as cited in Cohen 2011).

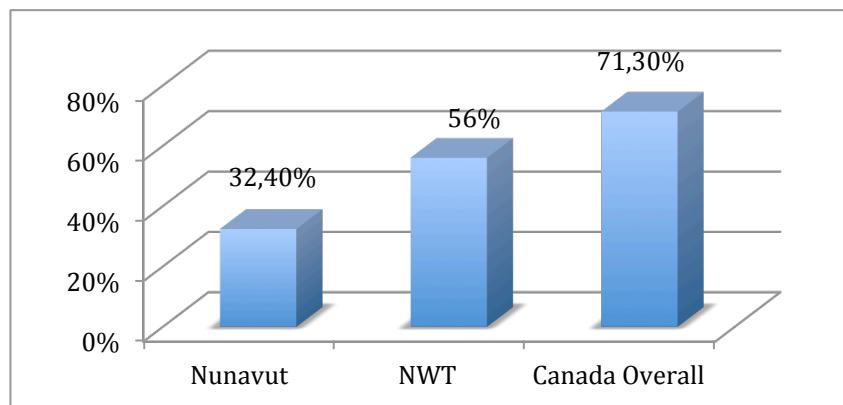
Students used visual cues and analysis of photographs to understand techniques residential schools used to colonize in Activity 7. In Activity 8: Survivor Stories, students explored first hand survivor accounts through audio, visual and written formats, and responded creatively to these stories. In Activities 9-12, the module's arc moves towards the future. Activity 9 exposes students to a diversity of people who dealt with residential schools in brave and influential ways at different points in history, as students are asked to make reasoned judgments based on evidence. Activity 10 asks students to evaluate the effectiveness of the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement*. In Activity 11, students explore the meaning of reconciliation in a written assignment.

Decolonization, presented to students as the ways in which people are striving to reclaim culture and identity, is addressed in Activity 12. The module's final project has students demonstrate their understandings of connections between the past and the present in relation to the impacts of residential schools, choosing different mediums to answer the question "How should society respond to the history and legacy of residential schools?" (*Residential School System in Canada...*2013: 206).

Given that these materials were newly developed, teacher training was an important step. In October 2012, all Northern Studies and Social Studies teachers from Nunavut and the NWT came together for a three-day professional development workshop on the history and legacy of residential schools to learn about how to deliver the module in their classrooms (Fowler & Willett 2014).

### *Decolonizing the Education System in Search of Better Outcomes*

The development of new curriculum materials is one strategy to address challenging classroom environments and a struggle to achieve desired education outcomes in the Canadian territories. In the NWT and Nunavut, attrition of students is a problem as students tend to move around and drop-out rates increase in the senior high school grades. In addition, rates of teacher turnover each year are very high; in the NWT, approximately 1/3 of high school teachers are new every school year (*Aboriginal Student Achievement Education Plan, 2011; NTI 2010-2011 Annual Report: The status of Inuit children and youth in Nunavut, 2011*).



**Figure 2:** High School Completion Rates for Nunavut and the NWT Compared to Canada Overall (Sources: *Aboriginal Student Achievement Education Plan, 2011; NTI 2010-2011 Annual Report: The status of Inuit children and youth in Nunavut, 2011*)

In Nunavut, the new module on residential schools and assimilation policies is one component of rewriting Grade 10 Social Studies, rooted in Inuit culture and knowledge. This new curriculum, being implemented over several years, replaces the Alberta curriculum previously used. Grade 10 Social Studies contains the residential schools module as one of five (Beardsall 2012). At the centre of the curriculum are the concepts of student identity and Inuit Qaujimaqtuqangit, Inuit knowledge and insights. Students are learning who they are as well as expectations of them from society. Nunavut's curriculum writers are developing social studies resources in a bi-lingual manner, writing the document collaboratively in both languages, as opposed to completing literal translation. The name of the Nunavut Social Studies course is *Inuuqatigiittiarniq - Seeking Harmony*. Nunavut curriculum writer Liz Fowler explains, "Inuuqatigiittiarniq [means] striving to live in

harmony; being good to one another; or to put it simply: citizenship” (Personal communication, October 18, 2012). According to Fowler, reconciliation is linked to Inuit cultural resilience:

Reconciling today has to begin from people’s own worldviews and strengths. When Inuit feel heard, balanced, celebrated and respected, amongst each other and the world, they have so much to give. What was never oppressed will be so highly profiled, shared, and celebrated that it will clearly show the strengths of Inuit and their cultural and linguistic uniqueness. Reconciling in part is feeling balanced and whole (Personal communication, November 10, 2012).

Similar to Nunavut, the NWT has undertaken a process to re-imagine parts of its high school curriculum. In the spring of 2011, a guiding committee of northern leaders, and a Northern Studies Teachers Advisory Committee were formed in the NWT to define the overall goals and objectives that should be reflected in a new Northern Studies curriculum for high school students (Personal Communication, John Stewart, March 13, 2012). The new Northern Studies course, composed of five modules, is one aspect of the Education Renewal and Innovation Plan (2013).

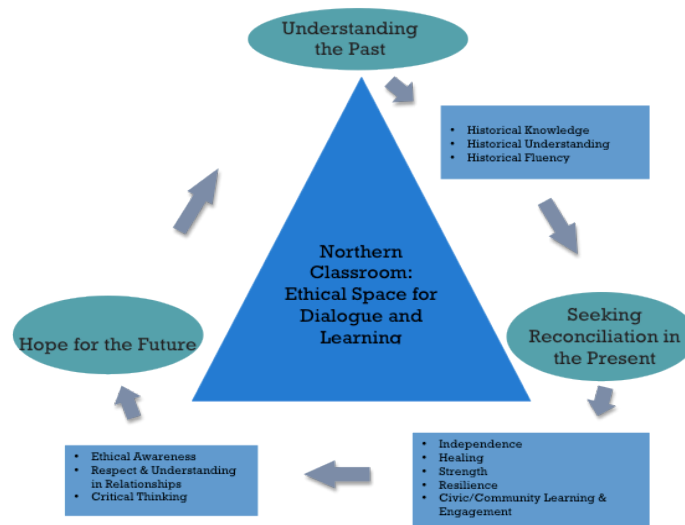
Nunavut’s Social Studies curriculum, and the NWT’s Northern Studies curriculum, including the module on residential schools, can be considered a step towards internal reconciliation in education. Nunavut and the NWT are able to define citizenship, goals, and how education will develop students to fulfill these goals, as enthusiastic, well prepared participants in global conversations (Beardsall 2012). It remains to be seen whether these developments can help territorial students achieve the improved outcomes in secondary school education that their communities and the government see as necessary.

### *Territorial Module Pilot Research: First Edition and Second Edition*

The objective of the territorial pilot research was to assess the extent to which the new module on residential schools and colonization<sup>5</sup> was meeting the territorial education departments’ goals (See Figure 3). A second purpose was to build on previous scholarship about how young people make meaning from difficult and violent history, and how it shapes their engagement in civic and community affairs. Three research deliverables were created for the territorial education departments. The first was a preliminary report to provide early research findings to the module’s teacher resource writing team, informing their revision process as they prepared the module’s second edition. The second research deliverable was a final report, involving 200 research participants, intended to link to existing scholarship on how students are influenced by learning difficult history, to provide a more fulsome picture for the module writing team as they moved forward. The third deliverable was a report on how the revised, second edition teacher’s guide, introduced in fall 2013, was supporting learning objectives, as tracked with NWT teachers.

## **Research Design**

Research questions were designed collaborating with the territorial module’s writing team. They were based on the three key goals of the module.



**Figure 3:** Residential School System in Canada Module - Intended Student Learning Outcomes

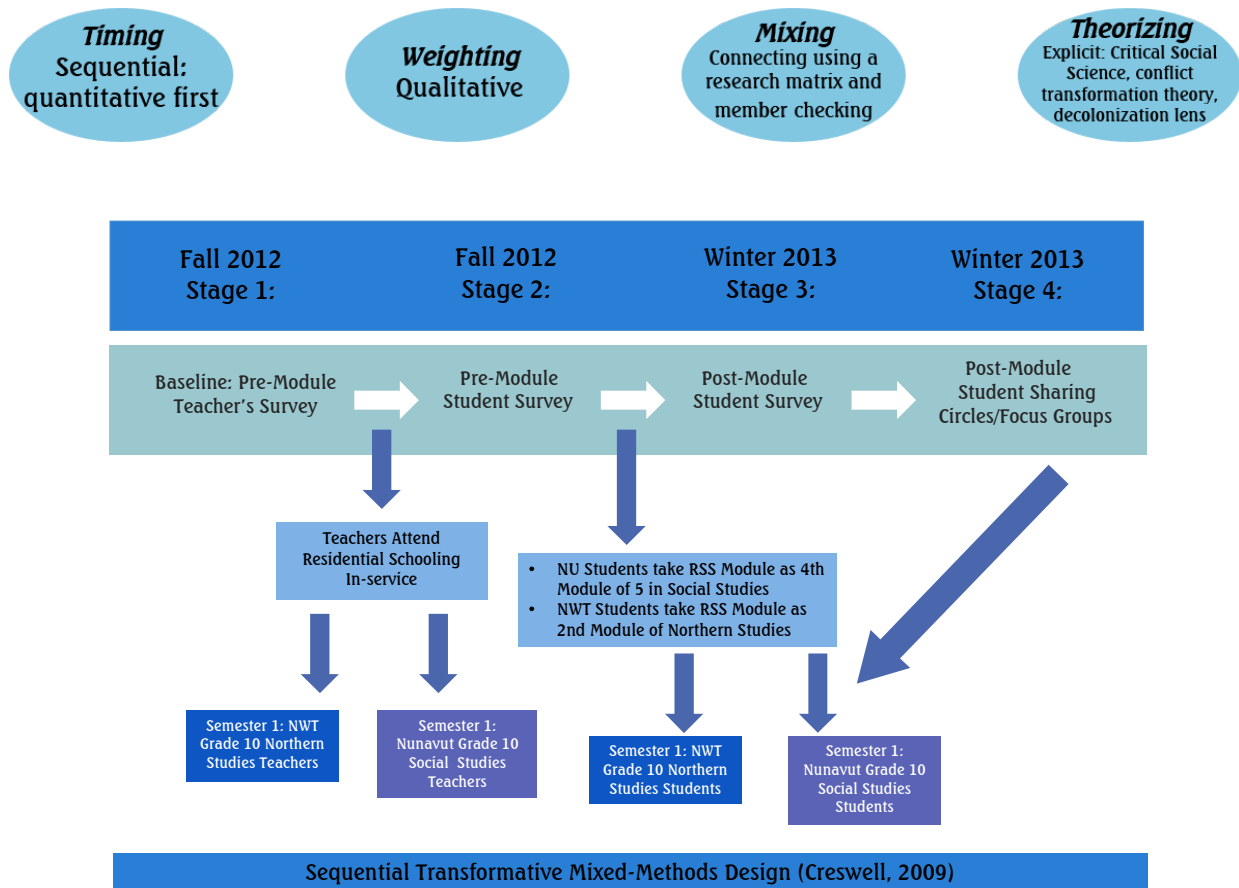
Questions were crafted to understand how each goal was being met:

1. What are NWT and Nunavut students learning about residential schools through the new module?
2. How is this learning affecting their thinking and their behavior?
3. Can secondary school education about residential schools influence the following:
  - Improve intergroup relationships?
  - Enable students to critically reflect on their own attitudes and behaviors?
  - Encourage students to consider responsibilities towards each other and towards the community?

The research design was a formative program evaluation, carried out during the territorial module's pilot in 2012-2013.

The research design relied on a pre and post-test survey of 203<sup>6</sup> students and 14 teachers before and after the new residential school module was taught, followed by student sharing circles/focus groups involving 89 students across the two territories. Teachers were surveyed prior to their teacher training, and again after they had taught the module for the first time. Students were surveyed prior to the module beginning, and again upon its completion. Surveys were not a test intended to capture what information students had retained, but looked at elements of community engagement, critical thinking, and ethical decision-making.<sup>7</sup>





**Figure 4:** Territorial Pilot Research Design and Data Collection Overview

The final stage of the process was 13 student focus group / sharing circles interviews which took place in 9 communities. This method fits a critical social science research approach, and was designed respecting Indigenous research methodologies. This involved considering the importance of relationship building in the research process, a holistic interpretation of participants' information, and the use of storytelling methods (Wilson 2008; Kovach 2009; Thomas 2008). Collaborating with the NWT and Nunavut module writing team, the author designed research methodology and survey tools, coordinated survey and data collection and facilitated student sharing circles across eight regional school districts in the NWT and Nunavut.<sup>8</sup> The study of the second edition module, conducted in 2013-2014, consisted of surveys and interviews with six teachers representing three regional school districts in the NWT.

## Findings

### Teachers

Teachers across both territories reported increased confidence in their own abilities. Teachers felt they could develop student understandings of historical significance, foster deliberation amongst their students, support skills that enhance historical perspective taking, and help students develop empathy. Teachers also reported feeling more prepared to build community centered classrooms. The increase in teachers' sense of confidence and skill in being able to facilitate learning for their

students, known as teacher self-efficacy, is an encouraging finding in the NWT and Nunavut. There are major advantages of efficacious teachers in the classroom. They demonstrate higher professional commitment, are more likely to persist with struggling students, and to experiment with methods of instruction. Teacher beliefs about their effectiveness are also powerfully related to student outcomes, and influence students' own sense of being capable and motivated (Colardarci 1992; Gibson & Dembo 1984; Allinder 1994; Barr 2010).

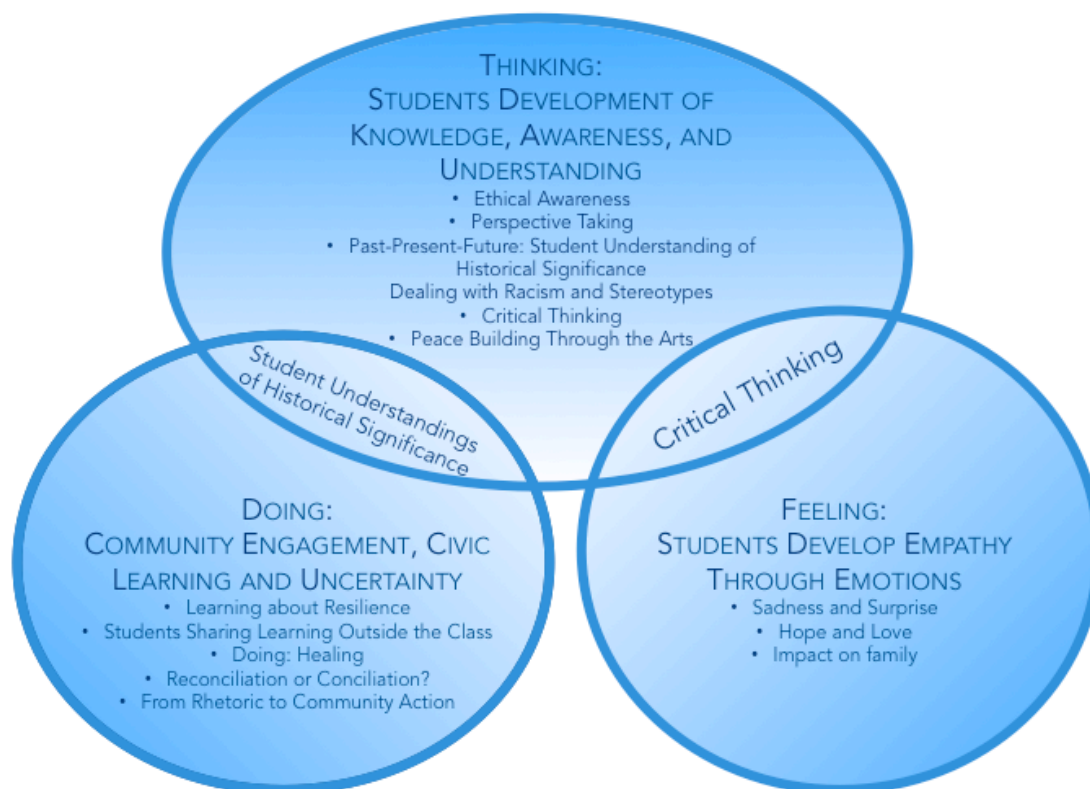
The results of the territorial pilot research indicated that in-service training increased teachers' sense of ability to facilitate change in their students. All teachers participating in this study reported that they increased their understanding of the history of residential schools in Canada after receiving training and then teaching the module. For teachers, the most effective aspects of their training were experiences with former residential school students, their training session on getting the module started, and seeing the module's activities modeled. These teacher-training strategies, reported as very powerful, have the potential to be successfully replicated in future teacher-training. In 2013-2014, teachers' perceived growth in their own awareness, enhanced understandings of historical significance, and increase in knowledge about residential schools led them to report more meaningful interactions in relationships with students and parents.

However, for the 2013-2014 year, the territories shifted to a regionally delivered teacher-training model, rather than the territory wide model used at the module's inception in 2012. Teachers reported inconsistencies in training between regions. While some training was perceived as excellent preparation, other teachers noted that the 2013-2014 training would not be adequate for new teachers in the North. Providing a consistent training model for all regions that adequately prepares new teachers will be a key strategy moving forward.

Overall, teachers felt energized and motivated by their teaching experiences, and felt a sense of professional growth and learning as a result of teaching this module. After teaching the module, teachers had increased confidence in their ability to engage students in civic learning and ethical awareness. The challenge will be how to sustain this level and quality of teacher training given the high rates of teacher turnover in the NWT and Nunavut (*Aboriginal Student Achievement Education Plan 2011*; *NTI 2010-2011 Annual Report: The status of Inuit children and youth in Nunavut 2011*). This will be crucial in retaining the promising levels of teacher self-efficacy, and satisfaction with their professional development and growth that were demonstrated in the territorial pilot study.

### *Student Learning*

Findings indicated that students developed deeper understandings of the significance of historical events and an enhanced ability to understand historical perspectives. After completing the module, students and teachers reported increased student empathy, critical thinking skills, ethical awareness and decision-making strategies through the pedagogies employed. Students reflected on the different experiences of former residential school students, and showed an understanding of the moral and ethical aspects of decision-making in history. The development of empathy towards former residential school students<sup>9</sup> was widespread and strong amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, including in non-Indigenous students who identified themselves as being from families that had recently immigrated to Canada.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 5:** Student Sharing Circles Thematic Map

Findings indicated that the module's first edition had limited effectiveness in empowering students to take active roles in shaping their communities and connect history to their identities. According to teacher surveys, half of classes sampled completed all 12 module activities; teachers reported insufficient time to complete course components. This was an obstacle to achieving learning objectives addressing civic and community engagement. Notably, half of all student research participants across all regions studied shared portions of their learning outside of class, as reported by students during focus groups. While there was broad consensus amongst students that their learning was important, many expressed deep uncertainty about what role they could play in reconciliation in the future, and in preventing harms from happening again. Other students felt that learning difficult history would play a role in shaping the future.

### *Response to Preliminary Research Findings: Actions and Results*

The writing team used findings from the territorial pilot study to revise the teaching resource and develop a second edition of the module. One key aim was to enable teachers to complete all 12 activities with their students, towards developing students' capacities to engage in future focused strategies in their communities. The module writing team's adaptations included developing a Health Canada support video on how teachers can better care for themselves and their students in dealing with traumatic subject matter. The writing team also distributed a resource on engaging elders in the classroom. The team added a new section to the module's second edition, which outlined concrete options for students' final projects. These included art, multimedia projects, a persuasive letter, or an action project, focused on community expressions of reconciliation. Tracking the use of the module's second edition amongst teachers, there was progress on the

comprehensive implementation of all 12 module activities, plus students' final project. Teachers were better able to complete all activities. Efforts to support students' roles in reconciliation are paying off: In 2013-2014, classrooms demonstrated more concrete outcomes regarding students' civic and community engagement. Teachers provided examples of students' innovative final project work: these ranged from art, students creating videos depicting historical moments, student generated program and infrastructure proposals, to student led policy debates and mapping projects. This was a notable improvement from the results demonstrated by the module's first edition, where findings on civic engagement were mixed. Some teachers noted they had not yet reached the ultimate goal of authentically engaging the community in the students' learning. Ongoing efforts are needed to support teachers towards this aim. For example, students at lower literacy levels struggled with some activities in the second edition of the module. Teachers identified this as a barrier to full implementation of activities, a finding supported across all regions sampled.

## Discussion

The territorial pilot study resulted in four key themes: empathy, student understandings of historical significance, critical thinking and critical hope.<sup>11</sup> This paper focuses on the latter three themes, which link directly to fostering a critical, engaged and empowered citizenry, necessary for fostering human capital in the Canadian North.

### *Historical Significance: "We Can Understand More and Pass All the Knowledge and History to our Future Generations"*

*...My grandma would always talk about the stuff that she's been through...Mostly how their traditional lives changed, how they lost their language and stuff...I felt devastated. I felt sad and I felt kind of hurt in a way because to think that if that happened, if that were not to happen, I wouldn't be speaking English right now. I'd know more about my culture. I'd be out on the land, I think. I'd do more traditional stuff...Well, people usually don't talk about the stuff that they've gone through throughout their lives, and I think it's really important that they express their feelings and to be able to understand that this is a very important issue that's been going on for years...people should talk more about it, so we can understand more and pass on the knowledge and all the history and all the right answers to our future generations ... then probably [we] will become better leaders for our community. And they would probably try to create a way to bring Aboriginals and other people all together and share and to have a lot of . . . things going on to help rebuild culture.*

- Grade 10 Dene Student, NWT

This student's increased ability to link the past, present and future was shared by students across the North in the territorial pilot. Teachers across five regions noted that students had a better understanding of how history has influenced the present after completing the module. Across sharing circles, students consistently used the historical examples of residential schools and assimilation policies to shed light on emerging issues in contemporary life. For example, the student in the quote above demonstrated an increased ability to see the present as a result of the past. Students are developing the tools to navigate challenges facing Canadian arctic jurisdictions. These include inequalities in access to education, health services and infrastructure compared to the rest of Canada and to other regions in the circumpolar north (Simon 2014).

In a study of adolescents in Germany, Carlos Kolbl, a German scholar of historical sense and Daitch

education, found that students moved past historical consciousness from family history to national history, and to history in foreign countries and continents (2009). A student in the territorial pilot study demonstrated this broader historical understanding:

People should know different struggles that people have had with religion, like all over Europe things happened. Hitler destroyed the Jews and until recently people were allowed to shoot Indians in Australia. The Spanish destroyed all the Mayans and stuff like that. It happens everywhere. It's not just a problem here in Canada or in the North. It's everywhere in the world it happens. People should be aware and learn to love each other and not fight so much.

Kolbl (2009) interpreted similar findings amongst students in Germany regarding the relevance that they attribute to history with reference to their own present and future lives. In the territorial study, a number of students in focus groups felt strongly that the experience of human rights abuses in Canada should be addressed beyond the North and linked to global contexts and histories. A student expressed frustration that the history of residential schools and assimilation, and how they have shaped the North, are not universally available to students across Canada, "How they can realize what we went through if they don't even know we exist?"

This students' frustration that the North and its histories are invisible to much of Canada is shared by a group of leading authors who analyzed Canadian policies towards the North. In their book, *Arctic Front, Defending Canada in the Far North*, Coates, Morrison, Poeltzer and Lackenbauer (2008) argue that Canada has misunderstood Arctic sovereignty and what is required to achieve it, which is why the sovereignty debate continues to resurface. In the authors' analysis, Arctic sovereignty could be achieved through investing in communities, northerners, and the institutions that will help them to advance regional and national interests. Noting similar patterns as the Grade Ten student did, the authors trace the history of the Canadian Government's neglect of the region over a century; "Canada has spouted the rhetoric of Arctic engagement in the past and then done nothing" (Coates et al 2008: 189). This long-term lack of constructive engagement from the Canadian state has contributed to the significant gaps in education that territorial education departments are grappling with today.

### ***Critical Thinking: "It's Not Something You Can Hide and Not Learn About"***

*I read the book with my mum a little...she couldn't believe that we were learning it...She thought...it's good to know this since we live in the North, but it's kind of harsh too. But then her and [my stepdad] got in a debate about it because I learned the Holocaust in Grade Six and so it's basically the same thing and people have to know it, so it's not something you can hide and not learn about.*

- Grade 10 Non-Indigenous Student, NWT

The student quoted described his family's reaction to reading a memoir written by a former residential school student. Students were tasked with writing a book review of survivor memoirs and novels, which enabled them to empathize with the characters. Many students who participated in the territorial pilot study demonstrated an enhanced capacity to think critically. Richard Paul and Linda Elder define critical thinking as, "The art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it" (as cited in hooks 2010: 9). Paul and Elder remind us that critical thinkers, "seek to think beneath the surface, to be logical and fair. They apply these skills

to their reading and writing as well as to their speaking and listening” (as cited in hooks 2010: 9). Students demonstrated attributes of critical thinkers seeing both sides of a complex issue regarding positive experiences of some former residential school students. Black feminist scholar and educator bell hooks (2010) contends that critical thinking is a process that demands participation on the part of teachers and students. This idea is supported by the findings of the territorial pilot study: Across four regions, NWT and Nunavut teachers experienced an increase in their overall sense of self-efficacy towards building students’ capacities to take different perspectives and examine the moral dimensions of history. Teachers viewed their students as more capable of reflecting on different experiences in history, particularly when discussing the positive and negative experiences of former residential school students. Similarly, students also reported an enhanced ability to understand different perspectives and their moral implications. For example, a student explained how the literature he read allowed him to take the residential school student’s perspective, “[my book] was surprising because I really don’t know what actually happens until you can experience it for yourself, and it let you experience it a little bit because you’re kind of walking in the person’s shoes in a way.”

#### *Community Centered Classrooms and Fostering Deliberation*

Classrooms open to taking different perspectives help students develop the skills necessary to resolve conflicts. These skills, which are central to a healthy democracy, are more likely to be used in adulthood, if they are developed during adolescence (Avery & Hahn 2004). Engaging students on residential schools can transform how the protection of human rights is understood by the students. In one of the module’s activities, students are exposed to historical accounts and asked to make a reasoned judgment relying on evidence. Students defend a position from many perspectives and there is no right answer, for example, during discussions on former students who had both good and bad experiences at the schools (*The Residential School System in Canada...*2013).

The findings of the territorial pilot study support the idea that critical thinking can be fostered through a community-centered classroom. This is considered a classroom environment where students treat each other with respect, and supports growth in students’ capacities to discuss difficult and controversial topics (Barr 2010). In this study, teachers reported development in students’ willingness and ability to debate on meaningful issues covered in the module. hooks (2010) proposes that teachers must be open at all times, and willing to acknowledge what they do not know, which often runs counter to their academic training. This aligns closely with the module’s guidelines on “teacher as facilitator” (*The Residential School System in Canada...*2013: 7).

Authors Sylvan Barnet and Hugo Bedau explain “critical thinking requires us to use our imagination, seeing things from perspectives other than our own and envisioning the likely consequences of our position” (as cited in hooks 2010: 10). In open classroom climates, territorial findings indicate that this module is developing young northerners’ capacities for critical thinking, understanding, care and compassion, aligned with the module’s aims. Political philosopher Amy Guttmann identifies deliberation as one of the primary ways that citizens resolve conflicts. She explains, “public discussion and decision making ... aim to reach a justifiable resolution, where possible, and to live respectfully with those reasonable disagreements that remain unresolvable” (as cited in Avery & Hahn 2004: 196).

*Ethical Awareness and Moral Dimensions of History*

Findings from both teacher and student interviews and surveys in this study demonstrate students' growth in ethical awareness and moral dimensions of history. Ethical awareness in students, understood as the ability to promote students' capacity to understand others' points of view and to coordinate them with one's own, is developed through the module. For example, after studying the federal government's apology, a teacher reflected on a student's careful consideration of the ethical dimension to what she had learned. "[The] student felt strongly that the apology should have directly represented the people who did the wrong, otherwise it doesn't mean anything." The student showed competency by considering the perspective of the main actors in the federal apology, and observing the moral implications. According to Peter Seixas of the Historical Thinking Project, when students understand the moral dimension of history, they "should expect to learn something from the past that helps us in facing the moral issues of today" (2006: 11). Students in this study demonstrated that they were able to use their learning about the past to consider contemporary moral issues.

***Critical Hope: "Because We All Have Something to Learn From One Another"***

*The other day, my mum and I, we were having a conversation about culture and everything, and my mum, growing up, because my family and I, well, I wasn't born here, because my mum, she's always like be proud of who you are, blab, blab, blab, and I was always like, stop, what are you doing. . . so I was telling her the other day how I learned to appreciate who I am and where I come from because for me I can go home and speak my language and eat my cultural food and just do all these things. And I didn't realize how much of a privilege that actually is and so I was just letting her know that I was learning about this and how residential schools helped me realize that.*

- NWT student

This student identified as having recently immigrated to Canada with her family. The student's words illustrate a number of notable findings from the territorial pilot, including how reconciliation is understood by students, challenges faced by students in moving from rhetoric to action in community engagement, and the importance students place on resilience when considering healing from historical trauma, like residential schools.

*Reconciliation or Conciliation?*

The module teacher's guide points out that there "are some who argue that Canada is not ready for reconciliation and instead what is needed is the work of conciliation - which means, to bring agreement or respectful relations between two parties" (*Residential School System* 2013: 5). Teachers and students are encouraged to consider whether reconciliation was politically or economically motivated. The guide also points out that there is a long history and many examples of harmonious, mutually-beneficial relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples (*Residential School System* 2013). In *Reconciliation or Conciliation? An Inuit Perspective*, John Amagoalik, an instrumental statesman who worked towards the creation of Nunavut in 1999, questions whether there has ever been a truly harmonious relationship between Settler Canadians and the original inhabitants of North America:

The history of this relationship is marked by crushing colonialism, attempted genocide, wars, massacres, theft of land and resources, broken treaties, broken promises, abuse of human rights, relocations, residential schools, and so on. Because there has been no harmonious relationship, we have to start with *conciliation*. We have to overcome distrust and hostility, make things compatible, and become agreeable (2008: 93).

Written prior to the federal apology in 2008, Amagoalik's article describes some of the steps Canada should take to facilitate conciliation: Canada must apologize, abandon its culture of denial, stop honoring historical figures who committed crimes against Aboriginal people, address systemic socio-economic disparities, honor its treaty obligations, and acknowledge Inuit contributions to Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic (Amagoalik 2008). Amagoalik also contributed an article to the second edition of the module for students to reflect on. He emphasized that following the federal apology, "our children must learn of this dark period in Canada's history. It must be part of our national school curriculum. They should also learn of our recent history of constitutional and land claims negotiations with our governments, and the agreements we have signed that future generations can use as our people recover from the colonial past." (*Residential School System* 2013: 93).

#### *From Rhetoric to Community Action: Moving Past Cynicism*

Amagoalik (2008) introduces the idea of an unsettling approach to truth-telling and reconciliation in Canada. Scholar practitioner Paulette Regan's work supports this unsettling approach; she argues that struggle and hope are necessary in addressing the past and building the future (Regan, 2010). This posed a challenge for students in the territorial pilot study, as confronting the realities and harms of the policies of assimilation and residential schools led some to feelings of being overwhelmed and paralyzed. As reported in focus groups, 65% of students in the territorial study did think that their learning would result in concrete changes in their communities, others felt stuck. Students from all demographic groups experienced these feelings; in some Indigenous students, the feeling manifested as anger or grief, and in non-Indigenous students the anger was also experienced as cynicism or apathy. A student using the first edition summed up the feeling of being stuck between awareness and action: "learning about it does make us more aware of things, but not many teens that I know of would take action for it."

As students become aware of the structures of domination and the role of institutions which reinforce them, in the absence of a coherent social movement to promote an alternative, there is a risk of paralysis and pessimism. Therefore transformative learning can occur only when "critical reflection and social action are part of the same process;" maintaining critical hope reinforces the capacity to understand that although we cannot change the past, we are not held prisoner by it (Regan 2010: 23). Breaking free from students' feelings of disillusionment requires considering how empowering the effects of students' small everyday actions towards decolonization can be.

As discussed, the territorial education departments made efforts to bridge the reported gap between learning and action when designing the module's second edition. The addition of the final project activity was described in a backgrounder in the second edition of the teacher's guide. For each project option, student examples were provided on a DVD accompanying module materials, to enable students to visualize the influence their work can have (Personal Communication, M. Willett, June 15, 2013).



The changes made for the module's second edition have made a concrete difference for student civic learning outcomes, interpreted as the students' sense of ability and confidence to engage in citizenship and create change in their own community.<sup>12</sup> In 2014, Teachers across three regions provided examples of students' increased understanding of democratic values, though not all classrooms experienced this outcome. One teacher explained the sense of empowerment on civic affairs that his students came away with:

The students also related the history to the current political climate. Twenty some students held a mock vote on rations in the liquor store – the ration system was removed 2 years ago. (The module's activity) set the stage for proactive political engagement and how to do something about it. One student is actively involved in the local land corporation – they are looking at how this history applies to what is happening now. Some students are being groomed to be tomorrow's leaders. Aside from the political, the social side was the biggest for me. (All the students) understood or walked away from the course wanting to contribute to a better social climate (in their community).

These findings indicated the teachers were able to create classroom environments which enabled growth in students' capacities for deliberation on controversial and difficult topics (Barr 2010). A teacher noted that this module began discussions in the community on a taboo topic amongst community members, "I think they had an opportunity to speak with elders and their own family about the issue. It opened up dialogue that may not have happened without this curriculum."

Henry Giroux explains, "Hope makes the leap for us between *critical education*, which tells us what must be changed; *political agency*, which gives us the means to make change; and *concrete struggles* through which change happens" (as cited in Regan 2010: 216). Supporting high school students in the North to activate their feelings of hopefulness into community engagement requires understanding the local implications of colonization and residential schools. Scholar Taiaiake Alfred reminds us that all of the world's big problems are in reality very small and local problems. As he puts it, confronting colonialism is a personal, and in some ways, a mundane process (2009). With Alfred's idea in mind, the students' small, but meaningful actions have the potential to build momentum for just and peaceful change (Regan 2010).

## Conclusion

The territorial pilot study has demonstrated that to teach students difficult history and prepare them to solve contemporary problems, efforts must go beyond simply producing learning materials for classroom use. Well planned and thorough teacher training, evaluative research, subsequent revision and follow up support, as well as setting courses as mandatory for all students, are all critical steps in enabling students to reach key learning objectives. Changes made from the first edition module pilot to the second edition are meeting learning objectives more effectively. The revised second edition module shows encouraging potential for NWT and Nunavut teachers to become more confident in supporting their students' learning. Use of these materials in classrooms are providing teachers with professional satisfaction and growth, and are developing students' capacities to participate in society as thoughtful, critical and aware citizens. "Canada must acknowledge its past history of shameful treatment of aboriginal peoples," said Inuk leader John Amagoalik. "It must acknowledge its racist legacy. It should not only acknowledge these facts, but also take steps to make sure that the country's history books reflect

these realities,” (2008: 93). By devoting 25 hours of mandatory class time for every high school student in the NWT and Nunavut to learning about residential schools, the territories have taken up Amagoalik’s challenge. Other jurisdictions are following suit with the production of their own materials for the classroom, including Alberta, Yukon and Ontario.

If George Orwell was correct that “those who control the past control the future,” (1949: 37) we face a great risk if we do not educate youth about Canada’s brutal history. By failing to pass on the lessons we have learned, we are opting out of crucial conversations about democracy and human rights. Through this module, students learn that democracy is fragile. Even at the heart of what we persuade ourselves is a just society, basic human rights can be denied as they were by residential schools and assimilation policies. A healthy democracy, which respects human rights, is dependent on the responsible participation of citizens, lead by young people who are equipped to think critically and empowered to act. This is particularly important in a rapidly developing environment like Canada’s North, where the ability to cooperate across sectors and beyond borders is likely to become a necessity.

Discussions of controversial issues in the classroom are not easy but are a crucial step in preparing Northern students for new economic, technological and environmental challenges. The territorial module builds compassion and enhances critical thinking amongst students. Equipped with stronger critical thinking skills, territorial students will be better positioned to shape the future in a globalized, rapidly changing, and challenging Arctic.

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## Notes

1. In 2009, then Governor General Michaëlle Jean noted that Canada is the only Northern state that doesn't have a university in the Territorial North (in Canada, North of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel) – In this regard, Canada is four decades behind Norway, Finland, Sweden, and the United States in developing Arctic universities (Simon 2014).
2. States demonstrating growing interest in the Arctic include Germany, France, China, Spain and South Korea. International institutions, such as the European Union and NATO are outside the circumpolar region, but are increasingly vocal about their various interests in Arctic affairs (Plouffe 2011).
3. There is an expansive and thorough body of historical literature on the system of residential schools in Canada and its legacy, which is beyond the scope of this paper. For further reference, please refer to Brant, Archibald and DeGagne's edited volume, *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*; John Milloy's *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System*; Paulette Regan's *Unsettling the Settler Within*; and the Royal Canadian Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.
4. The module defines assimilation as "The process in which one cultural group is absorbed into another, typically dominant, culture" (2013: 223).
5. The term "colonization" is defined in the teachers' guide of the module as "the establishment of a settlement on a foreign land, generally by force. It is also often used to describe the act of cultural domination" (2013: 223). Colonization and its consequences are explored in the module in Activity 5, "Colonial Policies and the Creation of the Residential School System," in Activity 6, "Perspectives on the History of Colonization," as well as in Activities 10-12.
6. The student sample was made up of Dene, Inuit, Inuvialuit/Inuinait, Métis and non-Indigenous students, including students of Eurosettler ancestry, other immigrant ancestry, and students who identified as recent immigrants to Canada.
7. To create the student surveys used in this study, I adapted the surveys created by *Facing History and Ourselves*, which researched the influence of Holocaust education on students in the USA. The organization conducted a 5-year evaluation study, aiming to measure social and ethical awareness and civic learning. I obtained permission from the authors of the survey tools from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and from the authors of the additional scales adapted for the *FHIAO* research, to use and adapt the tools for the Canadian North. All survey tools were adapted to replace references in the U.S to Canadian and Northern references (Selman, R. L., Barr, D. J., Feigenberg, L., & Facing History and Ourselves 2007a; Fine, Bermudez, & Facing History 2007; Flanagan et al., 2007; Kahne, et al. 2006).
8. To complete this study, I obtained ethical approval and research licenses from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Review Board, the Aurora Research Institute in the NWT, and the Nunavut Research Institute. To obtain a research license in the NWT through Aurora Research Institute, 23 Indigenous governance organizations, regional bodies and municipalities were consulted and had an opportunity to comment and ask questions about the study. With the support of the territorial education departments respective Deputy Ministers, I was granted permission from school superintendents in each region in the NWT and Nunavut to undertake the study

informing this paper.

9. In the study informing this paper, none of the student participants are former residential school students. However, 54% of student participants reported that they have family members who attended the schools, and are therefore intergenerational survivors. An additional 22% did not know whether a family member had attended, and 24% did not have a family member attend residential schools; this data is drawn from student survey results.
10. During student sharing circles, some non-Indigenous students self identified as being from new immigrant families; their comments are reported as such in this paper.
11. Each of the key overarching themes discussed begins with a student vignette from a different sharing circle. The vignettes highlight overlapping themes, which appeared across qualitative and quantitative sets of study findings: teacher surveys, student surveys and student sharing circles and focus groups.
12. Student civic learning and community engagement describe the teacher's ability to promote students' understanding of key democratic principles and values, including freedom of expression, the protection of vulnerable groups, equity and justice, and the importance of civic participation (Barr 2010; Seixas 2006).

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