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Culturally responsive policy development: Co-constructing assessment and reporting practices with First Nation educators in Alberta

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Culturally responsive policy development: Co-constructing assessment and reporting practices with First Nation educators in Alberta

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Abstract

Informed by an adaption of the tri-level reform framework, we collaborated with a First Nation district student assessment committee, school principals, and district personnel to develop a student assessment policy. Through a series of workshops and meetings with school administrators and classroom teachers from Tsuut'ina Nation, located in southern Alberta, Canada, we created an assessment, evaluation, and reporting policy aligned to Tsuut'ina fundamental values, provincial priorities, and best practices in student assessment. Teaching practices that are aligned to the three educational pillars of learner outcomes, instruction, and assessment, as well as the Tsuut'ina fundamental values, have the potential to impact the Nation's student educational success. We discuss implications of this work in relation to collaboration, Indigenous world view, and outcome-based reporting.

Keywords: Assessment, evaluation, and reporting; Indigenous world view; collaboration; tri-level reform framework

Positionality

We are university-based, non-Indigenous researchers, both committed to understanding and strengthening the experiences of Indigenous students in Alberta. We teach in the Faculty of Education at a small liberal arts university located near Tsuut'ina Nation schools. Our partnership with Tsuut'ina Education has developed over three years of collaborative work. We believe that more meaningful educational opportunities for Indigenous students must be provided, and as settler scholars, we acknowledge we do not have the same lived experiences as the Tsuut'ina people (Seitz & Hill, 2019). We are grateful to partner with them to deepen our understanding of the historical wrongs and political challenges of Indigenous peoples. We acknowledge that education plays a significant role in the reclaiming of their identity and culture.

Focus of research

Our commitment to a diverse and inclusive world view of education informs our relationship with Tsuut'ina Education. Our first opportunity to work together began with an invitation from the director of Tsuut'ina Education to assist the district in the development of a Tsuut'ina language framework and the infusion of Tsuut'ina culture in district schools (Seitz & Hill, 2019). Our

collaboration continued with a request to assist in the creation and implementation of a district-wide student assessment, evaluation, and reporting policy. The partnership also grew from an expectation for educators to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC, 2015) *Calls to Action* report. This report articulated 94 strategies "to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation" (TRC, 2015, p. 1). Our response to the request from Tsuut'ina Education addresses calls to action in reference to education; specifically, "Improving education attainment levels and success rates" (TRC, 2015, p. 2, Principle 10:ii). In this paper we discuss the theoretical framework and the steps that we used to create and implement a student assessment, evaluation, and reporting policy for Tsuut'ina Education K–12 schools. We also identify the implications for working towards change in teacher classroom practice.

The Tsuut'ina Nation is a First Nation reserve situated near our university in south Calgary, Alberta. Tsuut'ina Education works to foster a strong cultural identity through educational opportunities. The Tsuut'ina language, part of the Dene language family, has a foundational role in conveying Indigenous understanding and knowledge for the Tsuut'ina people. It is spoken only by the Tsuut'ina Nation (Endangered Languages Archive, 2021) and has been identified as critically endangered (Statistics Canada, 2016). Efforts have been made to revitalise the language, especially by the Tsuut'ina Gunaha Language Institute, through initiatives within the community and with the Nation's schools. Tsuut'ina Education oversees four schools with over 600 students: Chiila Elementary School, Tsuut'ina Middle School, Tsuut'ina High School, and Bullhead Adult Learning Centre. Our goal for the project was to take best assessment strategies from research that were reflected across the province and assist in the creation and implementation of a district assessment, evaluation, and reporting policy.

Literature review

Typically, change within educational systems, including school boards and school districts, is initiated at the senior leadership level. The nature of the change and the steps that are decided upon in achieving the change are stipulated by educational administrators who oversee schools. Although decisions are made at senior leadership levels, reporting on the progress of change implementation is usually done from the bottom up. This conceptualisation of leadership tends to be hierarchical: decisions are made at the top for the benefit of others below. However, this form of leadership does not adequately support the interests and needs of contemporary organisations in which change is a constant and information is necessarily shared by everyone in the community (Sanford et al., 2019). "There is a certain inflexibility in command and control organisations" (Gergen, 2009, p. 145). A more collaborative leadership framework that captures shared expertise, fosters collective understanding, and allows for shared decision-making seems better suited to the dynamic and interconnected manner in which school systems operate today (Furman, 2012). Promoting a balance

between top-down and bottom-up leadership promotes inclusive and participatory relationships (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Pepper, 2010). Policies that are acted upon collaboratively with the school district, the school administration, and the classroom teachers can have a positive influence on educational outcomes.

In school systems, the outcome of change should empower individuals to engage in work differently “because new beliefs about their capacity support the development of new skills” (Frontier & Rickabaugh, 2015, p. 3). Both teachers and students can develop new skills and competencies when they experience a shift in their understanding about the value of a task and their capacity to engage successfully in the task. Implementation of change should be undertaken with the view that students and teachers should be the primary users of the new strategies in learning (Frontier & Rickabaugh, 2015).

One of the significant areas of focus for change in educational settings is the improvement of student learning and student achievement. Research has indicated that effective planning is the cornerstone of effective instruction and assessment. Purposeful planning depends upon gathering information about what students have learned, where they are in the process of learning, and what instructions they need next in order to improve. Researchers have suggested that student assessment data are vital for monitoring quality instruction (Abrams et al., 2016; Popham, 2008). Indeed, student assessment is an important element in making appropriate instructional decisions to positively impact student learning (Shepard, 2000; Webber et al., 2013). If quality teaching is to be supported by quality assessment practices, then assessment must be planned simultaneously with instruction. Delaney (2009) supported this notion and recommended that school systems develop a conceptual model for student assessment based on sound assessment principles and the creation and implementation of policies that support teachers in their important work. Clear goals for measuring the achievement of Indigenous students are essential. The Canadian Council on Learning (2007) noted that “current approaches to measuring First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning in Canada do not reflect Aboriginal people’s articulation of holistic, lifelong learning” (p. 8). Thus, the improvement of learning outcomes for Indigenous communities is linked to a clear definition of learning success and the identification of an appropriate framework to measure it (Alberta Education, 2012).

Conceptual framework

When considering the conceptual framework that would direct the creation and implementation of the district assessment, evaluation, and reporting policy, our thoughts focussed on the alignment of content as described in provincial programs of study, instructional and assessment practices used in the classrooms and in the schools, and the support to the schools from the school district office. Fullan (2007) purported that sustainable educational transformation is achievable only with a tri-level reform framework solution. He proposed that the school, the district, and the government

must work in tandem to advance student achievement. In Canada, the federal government has no involvement in public K–12 education, so the provincial governments provide funding for education and set priorities for spending. First Nations schools are an exception, however, as they are funded by the federal government.

The conceptual framework that influenced this project is an adaption of Fullan's (2007) tri-level reform framework. For our project, we felt it appropriate to revise the framework to emphasise the classroom level (teachers), the school level (administrators), and the district level (Tsuut'ina Education). We believe that what teachers do in the classroom should be influenced by the guidelines set by the school principal. These guidelines, in turn, should be influenced by district-level policies. The Tsuut'ina education community is a small one, and the voice of each teacher and administrator is important when initiating change that is then overseen by the Nation's director of education. Fullan (2007) argued that in order to hold teachers accountable for improving student learning, they must be provided with the opportunity to gain new knowledge and skills that are guided by policies implemented at the district level.

Once created, the *Assessing, Evaluating, and Reporting Student Achievement Policy* would be ratified by the Tsuut'ina Board of Education. The Tsuut'ina director of education would then supervise its implementation. The actualisation of the policy would be the responsibility of the principal and teaching staff at each school. To implement change and influence student achievement, it is not enough to implement policy if policy is not acted upon. Implementing change requires a new way of thinking about how teaching and learning are carried out in the classroom and in the schools. Fullan's (2007) tri-level reform framework promotes the development of strong interrelationships across the three levels. Working together, the three levels build and strengthen capacity to achieve meaningful educational change that can have a positive impact on student achievement (Levin & Fullan, 2008). Indeed, strong relationships were a meaningful component of the collaboration between Tsuut'ina teachers, school administrators, and the Tsuut'ina director of education.

Methodological considerations for project

This project, framed by social construction theory (Gergen, 2009), is based on the grounding assumption that people co-construct meaning through conversation. Gergen and Gergen (1991) explained that accounts of the world take place in shared language systems, and that meaning making focusses on the "collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes" (Schwandt, 1998, p. 240). We used conversational accounts with Tsuut'ina educational personnel to inform our work. These meaningful, collective conversations were historically, socially, and culturally situated. The processes we followed and the final artefact of our work, the *Assessing, Evaluating, and Reporting Student Achievement Policy*, have meaning specifically for the Tsuut'ina educational community.

Indigenous ways of knowing differ from Eurocentric ways of knowing (Battiste, 2002; Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2009; Ottman & Pritchard, 2010). Indigenous knowledge (IK) has been validated as a “system of knowledge” and has become an important tool in the development of policy and the “decolonising and rethinking of education for Indigenous people” (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2009, p. 7). As a theoretical framework, IK recognises and affirms the languages, world views, teaching, and experiences of Indigenous people and is constitutionally protected in Canadian law (Battiste, 2005). Similarly, Munroe et al. (2013) have maintained that Indigenous ways of knowing are grounded in “context and experience, involve sophisticated and complex responses to the natural world, emerge in relation to place, and are embedded in Indigenous languages” (p. 321). “IK reconceptualises the resilience and self-reliance of Indigenous peoples and underscores the importance of their own philosophies, heritages, and educational processes” (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2009, p. 7). In this shift, it is possible to imagine the establishment of Indigenous languages and culture in schools and more opportunities for Indigenous students to experience success.

According to Riddell et al. (2017), a conceptual framework requires a set of ethical guidelines to support research—and, we believe, any collaborative practice carried out in partnership with Indigenous communities. The most significant theme in Indigenous research ethics is that every step in the research process “relies on relational processes” (Riddell et al., 2017, p. 8). Even though our collaboration with Tsuu’tina Education was not a research project, we were guided by several key ethical principles drawn from Riddell et al.’s work. They identified 13 principles for conducting research with Indigenous communities and groups. Of these, three were most applicable to our collaborative work: the understanding that research (a) builds respectful relationships, (b) honours traditional knowledge and knowledge holders and engages existing knowledge and knowledge keepers, and (c) provides opportunities for co-creation (Riddell et al., 2017, p. 7). These ethical principles provided an outline for our engagement with Tsuut’ina Education.

Development of policy

After an initial meeting, the director of education invited us to lead the project, shared the vision for the work, and confirmed that she had established a district-wide student assessment committee to assist us. At our first meeting with the district assessment committee, we gained an understanding of what was required at each school level and explored how we would work together. Our discussion included information about how report cards were organised with regard to curriculum outcomes and student achievement indicators and discrepancies between classroom instruction and the reporting of student achievement. Committee members shared concerns they had about the reporting of student effort and student attendance on report cards, inspiring conversation about the values and priorities the assessment policy should express. It became evident that we had a variety of thoughts and needs, from elementary teachers to high school teachers, that required careful consideration.

We decided to meet with teachers and administrators from each school level separately to hear their concerns. After these discussions, the decision was made that for a subsequent meeting with the assessment committee, we would bring samples of what we deemed to be effective district assessment policies to share with the teachers. We wanted to create opportunities for the committee to co-create the policy with us. We were careful to choose samples from other school districts that reflected best practices in assessment and evaluation procedures. These policy samples gave teachers an opportunity to evaluate and identify the elements that they would wish to see in their assessment policy. We discussed with the committee the assessment practices they identified and we clarified their priorities and values around these practices.

We incorporated this feedback from the committee into an initial draft of the policy. We shared it with the district assessment committee and asked for additional input, to ensure that their feedback was implemented as they intended it to be. We went through two further iterations of this process where we continued to receive feedback and make revisions accordingly. A significant recommendation from the committee was that the student assessment, evaluation, and reporting policy document reflect and support the Tsuut'ina Nation fundamental values of respect, integrity, equality, and accountability.

Once the changes had been completed and approved by the committee, the draft policy was shared with the Tsuut'ina director of education and the principals from each of the schools. The director of education and the principals supported the work the committee had done, so we invited them to share the draft policy with their teaching staff. We held meetings with teachers at each school so that they could directly share their feedback with us. A final step in the creation of the policy was a presentation to the Tsuut'ina Board of Education. After some discussion, the document *Assessing, Evaluating, and Reporting Student Achievement Policy* was ratified.

In our discussion with the board, it was identified that the implementation of this policy would require a significant shift in how assessment practices were to be carried out by teachers. Hence, we requested that the board delay implementation of the policy for one year so that opportunities could be provided for professional development for teachers. The Tsuut'ina Board of Education supported our recommendation, and we were asked to provide professional development for the teachers during the following school year. We delivered five professional development sessions to prepare teachers to implement the newly ratified district policy during the subsequent school year.

Alignment of policy with provincial education objectives

One of the research priorities for the provincial government is the implementation of professional practice standards for teachers as a way to guide the work that they do (Alberta Education, 2020). Teachers' work is linked to every aspect of student learning, and their efforts most directly impact student outcomes on a daily basis (Rotherham et al., 2008). Although First Nations schools are funded by the federal government in all provinces, in Alberta, these schools are affiliated with

Alberta Education because they follow the Alberta curriculum. Thus, First Nation teachers are also held to provincial professional practice standards. It is generally acknowledged that strong professional practice includes an understanding of content knowledge, sound pedagogical strategies, and responsiveness to diverse student learning needs and cultural contexts. A comprehensive understanding of student achievement can also be added to this list.

In our deliberations with Tsuut'ina Education, we recognised the value of aligning these provincial priorities with the work that we were being invited to do. Understanding how Indigenous communities define learning success and identify learning goals can help school districts to effectively plan programming for Indigenous students (Alberta Education, 2012). The creation and implementation of the district *Assessing, Evaluating, and Reporting Student Achievement Policy* supports three provincial priorities: (a) implementation of professional teaching strategies, (b) promising practices in supporting success for Indigenous students, and (c) supporting diversity.

Priority 1: Implementation of professional teaching strategies for teachers

One of the goals in developing the Assessing, Evaluating, and Reporting Student Achievement Policy was to improve student learning by refining and enhancing teachers' assessment skills to reflect best practices. The implementation of formative and summative assessment practices provides the road map for teachers to scaffold learner outcomes from the Alberta programs of study, in order to plan for clear and concise instruction and assessment. Teachers implement formative assessment strategies to provide purposeful and meaningful feedback to students. These strategies are supported by the research literature as significantly improving student achievement for all learners (Alberta Education, 2003; Kanu, 2007; Toulouse, 2016).

Priority 2: Indigenous education / Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students

Indigenous children have generally not had opportunities for the same quality of education that other children have had (OECD, 2017). In *Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students*, the OECD (2017) articulated four interrelated outcomes for encouraging the academic success of Indigenous students: (a) student well-being, (b) student participation, (c) student engagement, and (d) student achievement (pp. 12–13). All of these outcomes are interconnected in promoting the success of students. However, as student achievement is the focus of this project, the practices associated with assessment are of special interest. Suggested strategies to improve student achievement outcomes include the setting of deliberate and measurable targets, the communication of progress in reaching targets, attention to the experiences of students, and the persistence of effort over time (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Research by Kanu (2007) also found that student achievement was enhanced when Indigenous perspectives were included in the school curricula. These best practices link directly to our work in the creation of the district *Assessing, Evaluating, and Reporting Student Achievement Policy*.

Priority 3: Supporting diversity

Research demonstrates that Indigenous students' self-esteem is a key factor in their school success (Kanu, 2002). An educational environment that honours the culture, language, and world view of the Indigenous student is understood to be critical for achieving a balanced approach to teaching and learning:

Students who have an understanding and a secure sense of their own identities are likely to have the confidence and curiosity to ask critical cultural questions, and to be open to learning about people outside of their own cultural communities. (Ottmann & Pritchard, 2010, p. 37)

These qualities support students in every learning endeavour and foster an active and engaged student citizen.

Teachers benefit from a strong sense of cultural and professional identity as well. When teachers know themselves and their students well, relationships can flourish and learning is invigorated. Researchers have described the importance of examining the knowledge systems of educators, including Indigenous perspectives (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2009; Georgiou et al., 2020; Thomas, 2013), so that learning is enriched for students and the educational mandate is fulfilled. Toulouse's (2008) significant work on Indigenous student learning and self-esteem outlined the importance of implementing cultural values that honour the seven living principles. She made links between student learning and the living principles, regarding the principles as support and validation for Indigenous learners. She noted that a culturally responsive pedagogy that prioritises Indigenous perspectives will support positive learning experiences, strong relationships, and academic success while affirming students' cultural identity. Attention to Indigenous self-esteem—the connection between the physical, emotional-mental, intellectual, and spiritual realms—is paramount, she concluded (Toulouse, 2008). The success of Indigenous learners depends upon educators and schools respecting this view.

Alignment of policy with Tsuut'ina Nation values

First Nation education often does not reflect a focus on and connection to cultural identity. Redwing Saunders and Hill (2007) stated that for First Nation students to engage in meaningful learning, their cultural identity and cultural understanding must be reflected in the curriculum and within the classroom learning environment. In our conversations with Tsuut'ina Board of Education members and classroom teachers, we came to understand that embedding the fundamental values of Tsuut'ina Nation into the *Assessing, Evaluating, and Reporting Student Achievement Policy* would help bridge the fostering of a cultural identity for students within the Tsuut'ina community. As a result, the policy embraces the Tsuut'ina Nation's four fundamental values of respect, integrity, equality and accountability. Fostering student learner identity and promoting student relationships within the classroom and between the school and the larger

community are important aspects to creating successful and flourishing classrooms in any educational environment. This is especially true for Indigenous classrooms (Kanu, 2007; Redwing Saunders & Hill, 2007).

Table 1 illustrates the alignment between Tsuut’ina Nation fundamental values and the policy.

Table 1. Tsuut’ina Nation fundamental values and student achievement policy alignment

Fundamental values	Student achievement policy
Respect: We are respectful of ourselves, our Board, our Nation, our children, and our partners in education.	Teacher feedback to students should be presented in a manner that engenders self-confidence and a belief that they are capable learners. The level of achievement reflects the most recent evidence of what the student knows and is able to do in terms of the learner outcomes.
Integrity: We are honest, true, and ethical to ourselves and our stakeholders.	Teachers must keep meaningful records of evidence that indicates what the students know and are able to do in terms of learner outcomes. Teachers, according to their professional judgment, need to provide students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate their ability to meet learner outcomes.
Equality: We are fair and unbiased in our decisions and actions.	Classroom assessment methods must be fair and accurate—minimising all possible bias and giving all students equal opportunities to demonstrate their learning. Teachers will ensure accurate, fair, consistent, and equitable student evaluation.
Accountability: We are accountable to each other, the Nation, our children, and our future generation.	Students and parents are aware of the learner outcomes for assessment purposes at the beginning of each unit, program, or course. Teachers establish with students what they need to know and be able to do based on learner outcomes.

Our final document, in alignment with provincial priorities and Tsuut’ina Nation fundamental values, demonstrates respect for the input of the Tsuut’ina teachers and administrators and reflects provincial priorities.

Discussion

Our task was to create and implement a district student assessment, evaluation, and reporting policy to improve student learning outcomes and student achievement success in collaboration with Tsuut'ina Education. Bringing about educational change in classroom settings requires a new way of thinking about how teaching and learning will be carried out. "The solution to motivating people is to establish the right blend of tightness and looseness, or more accurately to build both into the interactive culture of the organisation" (Fullan, 2006, p. 37). This tension played out in the development and implementation of the policy. We had to be open and receptive to ideas from all interested parties and listen to and support their vision and values. We also had to ensure that the content of the policy reflected best practices of student assessment while acknowledging that these practices may require teachers to change their approaches to classroom instruction.

We were deliberate in the manner in which we applied the tri-level reform framework (Fullan, 2007) that we adapted for our work with Tsuut'ina Education. The directive for creating and implementing the policy came from the Tsuut'ina director of education at the district level. We met with the principals to gain an understanding of the needs of each school. The input for the content of the policy originated with the district assessment committee and the classroom teachers. The consultative meetings that we had with the teachers allowed us to build trusting relationships with them, and these relationships aided us in creating a policy that supported changes in values and beliefs about student assessment.

Implications

In discussing the implications for our work, we focus on three themes we identified as significant: collaboration, Indigenous world view, and outcome-based reporting. We address these themes through the lens of the three ethical principles noted earlier: building respectful relationships, honouring traditional knowledge and knowledge holders, and providing opportunities for co-creation (Riddell et al., 2017, p. 7).

Collaboration

Collaborative processes have a greater impact on bringing about required change (Anrig, 2015; Slater, 2004). Collaboration allows for knowledge to be shared, for perspectives to be heard, and for trusting relationships to be developed. Smith (2009) argued:

We need to develop transformative struggle that is inclusive and respectful of everyone. Doing it ourselves should ensure greater "buy in" from the people for whom the changes are intended. We need to draw on our cultural ways of collective work; of extended family obligation and our values of sharing and reciprocity. (p. 7)

Adopting a self-determining approach to addressing Indigenous student learning needs is the most effective way to focus on bringing about change (Smith, 2009). In our project, the partnerships

that were established between the director and the Tsuut'ina Board of Education, the principals, and the teachers provided an opportunity for change to be realised collaboratively and informed by cultural values.

Alberta Education (2012) has recognised collaborative relationships between Indigenous groups and stakeholders engaged in education and research with faculties of education as valuable partnerships. These cross-institutional partnerships encourage shared understanding and an exchange of ideas and resources. This dialogue supports continued consideration of best practices as they relate to student success. Dialogue can also ensure that any changes in practice are consistent with the specific needs and culture of the group.

The first key principle for ethical work that guided us was the building of respectful relationships. Collaboration is at the heart of Fullan's (2007) tri-level reform framework. Fullan (2010) suggested that the collaborative efforts of this framework have the potential to improve student achievement: "When teachers work together, led by an instructionally focused principal, they are much more successful than when they work alone" (p. 3). Mourshed et al. (2010) agreed. They analysed school systems that experienced sustained improvement in 20 diverse countries and found that a common thread was a strong reliance on collaboration. They further stated that highly collaborative practices in schools are connected to improved student achievement.

Assessment and grades play a significant part in the lives of students (DeLuca et al., 2019). Teachers realise that they have an obligation to use assessment strategies that provide fair and accurate evidence of learning. Tsuut'ina teachers recognised this obligation and were invested in understanding best practices in student assessment and evaluation. As the project progressed, they participated more fully in discussions about assessment, grading practices, and priorities. We also perceived a greater sense of engagement with the information we presented at professional development sessions. "Including organisational members in decision making, and affirming their contributions, may see their investment in the organisation bloom" (Gergen, 2009, p. 146). Over time, we saw evidence of teachers working less in isolation among grade levels within their schools and more in collaboration. Increased collaboration also held true for school and district administrators. We believe that the adapted tri-level reform framework model would be effective in other projects requiring educational change.

Indigenous world view

The second key principle for ethical work articulates that the collaboration between the researcher and the Indigenous community must honour traditional knowledge and knowledge holders and engage existing knowledge and knowledge keepers in the work. This Indigenous world view was an essential component of our work together. A primary goal of Aboriginal education is to provide meaningful formal education for students while ensuring that students develop and maintain their cultural identity (Munroe et al., 2013). The Indigenous ideals of connecting to the land, honouring

language, respecting traditional values, and recognising the inherent right to self-determination (Lee, 2015) are all matters of concern for Indigenous schools and communities. Tsuut'ina programming reflects the significance of these ideals through the teaching of "Tsuut'ina language, morals, and values to students" (Tsuut'ina Education, 2021, p. 2).

In our work with Tsuut'ina teachers, we acknowledged that the nature of the learning environment and the instructional strategies that were being implemented in their classrooms supported students in achieving their learning goals. We also came to understand that the value and importance of learning within Tsuut'ina Education was defined not only by individual student success, but also by success as a school community. These acknowledgements provided a foundation for our thinking in developing the *Assessing, Evaluating, and Reporting Student Achievement Policy*. Success would be realised not just in the improvement of individual student learning, but in the improvement of learning for the overall student body.

We intentionally embedded the Tsuut'ina fundamental values of respect, integrity, equality, and accountability into the context of the district policy. Success for the renewal of these values in educational contexts rests in part on changing the nature of instructional activities (Battiste, 2002) and, we believe, assessment strategies. Both components of teacher practice, instruction and assessment, should be culturally informed by the life experiences and cultural understanding of students.

"The distinctive features of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy are learning by observation and doing, learning through authentic experiences and individualised instruction, and learning through enjoyment" (Battiste, 2002, p. 18). Recognising diversity and planning for differentiated instruction are key to scaffolding learning for all students. Toulouse (2016) stated that assessment expectations for Indigenous students should also be realistic, maintain flexibility, and include a multiplicity of methods of evaluation. We attempted to incorporate these underlying Indigenous ideals and values in the creation and development of the policy.

Teacher instruction for student learning should allow for and be linked to students' experiences and previous knowledge. Twenty-first century learning emphasises the "importance of students' learning concepts or enduring ideas, rather than discrete facts" (Munroe et al., 2013, p. 324). Clearly connected to this perspective is the focus on students taking ownership of their learning through the setting of goals and self-assessment (Munroe et al., 2013). Assessment strategies that include high expectations for all students while incorporating differentiated assessment practices will support all student learning in 21st century learning environments.

Outcome-based reporting

The final ethical principle that guided us in this project suggests that work done together provides opportunities for co-creation. In the last decade, there has been a shift in education to outcome-based instruction (Anrig, 2015). This change moved curricula towards outcomes that specify what

a student needs to know and is able to do. Consequently, the way instruction and assessment are carried out in the classroom has transitioned to outcome-based reporting. In Alberta, in this outcome-based system, assessment, evaluation, and reporting of student learning are based on the outcomes from the provincial programs of study (Alberta Assessment Consortium, n.d.).

As Tsuut'ina Education schools did not have a common report card template, teachers agreed there was inconsistency across the district in how student achievement was reported. We worked with teachers to scaffold learner outcomes so that there was clarity about what needed to be taught and what evidence could be collected for assessment purposes. For example, we supported teachers in identifying the knowledge and the skills present in the learner outcomes so they could be readily identified for the purpose of planning instruction and assessment. Teachers began to see the link between ongoing assessment in the classroom and the collection of evidence of student learning with the reporting of student achievement. They recognised that these processes informed each other. It became evident to the teachers that the assessment and evaluation processes outlined in the final version of the *Assessing, Evaluating, and Reporting Student Achievement Policy* would support the adoption of outcome-based reporting.

Future collaboration

Our work on this project was supported by our partnership with Tsuut'ina Education. The application of Fullan's (2007) tri-level reform framework guided us in developing trusting and collaborative relationships with district, school, and classroom personnel. Our future collaboration will include further work with Tsuut'ina teachers on implementing outcome-based reporting. This work will see teachers collecting evidence of student learning aligned to learner outcomes as reflected in the newly developed outcome-based report cards. We also anticipate sharing our work at conferences and collaborating in writing projects that reflect shared authorship with Tsuut'ina Education.

Conclusions

Assessment is a complex practice that requires navigating and reconciling evidence of student learning with curricular learner outcomes and students' individual learning paths. Assessment statements on report cards are of consequence to students and parents and have meaning that follows students through their educational career. In this respect, assessment and its connection to planning and instruction are of significance in teacher practice. For Indigenous students, this relationship is worthy of attention. An affirmation of Indigenous ways of knowing requires a commitment to and belief in creating safe spaces for teaching practices that empower Indigenous students. These practices include curricular expectations (outcomes) that are transparent for students and are clearly linked to assessment practices. When students begin to shift their conceptions of themselves because they have been impacted by purposeful

teaching and assessment strategies that have guided them towards new standards, meaningful change can occur (Frontier & Rickabaugh, 2015). A focus on the contextualised and relational nature of Indigenous education can be instrumental in supporting student learning.

The key ethical principles that informed our collaboration on this project were enacted practically and relationally as we worked with Tsuut'ina Education. Fullan's (2007) tri-level reform framework gave us a structure that helped facilitate the engagement of classroom teachers, the four Tsuut'ina schools, and the district in this important work. A (re)focus on traditional knowledge systems is at the heart of providing Indigenous approaches to self-determination (Kaleimamoowahinekapu Galla et al., 2014). Teacher educators especially should be invested in collaborating with Indigenous communities as they strengthen their knowledge systems and create opportunities for their students. Our partnership with Tsuut'ina Education continues to offer us new possibilities in our work. It has enriched our professional practice and allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing. However, the relationships we have developed within the Tsuut'ina Education community is our most valued outcome.

Acknowledgment

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