



## ARTICLE

### Opening Spaces for Indigenous Teaching and Learning through Community-Based Teacher Education

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## Opening Spaces for Indigenous Teaching and Learning through Community-Based Teacher Education

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### Abstract

Following Nunatsiavut land claims on the Northeast Atlantic coast in Canada, Memorial University and the Nunatsiavut Government partnered to offer a community-based, Inuit-specific Bachelor of Education (IBED). This program was developed to lay a foundation for Inuit-governed schools. In the context of a broader research project on the development and mobilization of Inuit educational leaders in northern Canada, we listened to the stories of Inuit pre-service teachers, instructors, and administrators who contributed to the first IBED program. Analysis of their narratives shows how the physical location of the program opened learning spaces for Inuit students who were unwilling or unable to study outside their home region. We also discuss how program developers and instructors interpreted “community-based” to include anchoring learning in community relationships with each other and with local knowledge holders, as well as learning in and from the natural environment. Inuit and non-Inuit instructors modelled the incorporation of Inuit language, knowledges, culture, and pedagogies across the curriculum. We suggest that these processes opened ideological spaces which enhanced student engagement and retention and prepared the pre-service teachers to be agents of change in Inuit schools.

**Keywords:** Indigenous education; Inuit; Nunatsiavut; community-based education; culturally-relevant schooling

## Introduction

Bringing more trained Indigenous teachers into schools that are serving Indigenous students is a core component of opening up learning for Indigenous students (St. Denis, 2010). The call for more Indigenous teachers is based on the belief that Indigenous teachers will be able to create more culturally-relevant and thus engaging spaces in which Indigenous students will learn. In Canada, the National Committee for Inuit Education (2011) has identified the development of Inuit educational leaders as one out of ten core recommendations in order to achieve more equitable experiences and outcomes for Inuit students. However, the trajectory from the goal to the desired result is not obvious. Potential Indigenous teachers face practical barriers when it comes to entering and persevering in higher education (Berger, Inootik, Jones and Kadjuk, 2017). They also face ideological barriers when it comes to engaging with, and then becoming agents in, the formal education system that perpetuates what Marie Battiste (2013) calls the “imperialistic system of knowledge” (p. 107). In response to the National Committee on Inuit Education’s call for research that would support evidence-based implementation of its recommendations, our research team conducted case studies of promising practices in the development and mobilization of Inuit educational leaders. In this article, two scholars reflect back the stories of Inuit pre-service teachers in a community-based, Inuit-specific Bachelor of Education program. We highlight the common threads in their stories that show how this particular program has opened meaningful and effective spaces, or opportunities, for the inclusion of Inuit-centred teaching and learning. We conjecture how the spaces these pre-service teachers have moved within, as part of their program, might continue to broaden as they go out to teach in Inuit schools.

## Research Context

Sylvia Moore (second author), a mother and grandmother in an extended Mi’kmaq family, is Memorial University’s faculty lead in the Inuit Bachelor of Education (IBED) based in Goose Bay, Labrador, where this community-based program is situated. Shelley Tulloch (first author) is a non-Indigenous scholar with a long commitment to community-partnered research in Inuit communities.

Memorial University initiated discussions about a community-based teacher education program in Labrador following its 2009 Presidential Task Force on Aboriginal Initiatives. For Memorial University (2009), the vision was to increase access to post-secondary education for Indigenous students. The IBED materializes commitments to indigenizing Canadian learning settings, as affirmed in the Accord on Indigenous Education signed by Canadian Deans of Education (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2010).

The Nunatsiavut Government took Memorial up on the offer and partnered, starting in 2012, on development and delivery of a one-cohort program (Moore and Galway, 2018). For Nunatsiavut, the program lays a foundation for Nunatsiavut-controlled schools, which is one of the goals outlined in their land claims and self-government agreement (Labrador Inuit Association, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Government of Canada, 2005). Training Inuit

educators, particularly those who will infuse Inuit language and culture into schools serving Inuit students and who will be leaders in education, is a key priority of Inuit at the national level (National Committee on Inuit Education, 2011). The design, rationale, and implementation of the IBED program as a full-fledged B.Ed. infused with Inuit language and culture are described in Moore and Galway (2018). This research picks up on the students' experiences of the efforts to create a responsive and relevant Inuit teacher education program. This article meets students three years into their program and shares their stories of how the Inuit Bachelor of Education program opened spaces for their learning, engaging with language and culture, and nurturing as Inuit educational leaders.

## **Methodology**

This research uses narrative methodology, drawing on the voices of the IBED students as they tell their personal stories of lived experiences within the teacher education program. Narrative is consistent with Indigenous oral traditions and storytelling as ways of knowing (Little Bear, 2000). Story telling, in this case personal stories, reflects a decolonizing approach to research with Indigenous peoples (Smith, 1999) and gives voice to the experiences of the Inuit students. Constructing narratives of lived experiences provides an opportunity for the retelling of these stories, which create space for growth and transformation (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 71). Narrative research embraces the inclusion of multiple and collective voices and highlights the reflective relationship of speaker and listener (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Savin-Baden and Van Neikerk (2007) noted that narratives are commonly gathered through open-ended interviews (p. 462). Narrative and storytelling are approaches to research that support Inuit self-determination and the creation of counter-narratives of Inuit life.

This research is a case study embedded within a broader, ArcticNet funded research project, regarding the mobilization of Inuit educational leaders. Sylvia Moore lived the IBED story, even before the students joined; she re-tells the story as one who has been with the students all along. Shelley Tulloch comes to the stories as a curious outsider who proposed interviewing the IBED students. When asked, the students agreed to share their stories, but insisted that their stories be recorded in Goose Bay, where their program was taking place. This first interaction between the Shelley Tulloch and the students points to the importance of place in the students' experiences.

Interviews, to gather the personal narratives, were with twelve of the IBED's fourteen students and conducted at the Labrador Institute in Goose Bay in March 2017. In preparation for these conversations, the students reflected on and discussed amongst themselves what they wanted to share regarding their experiences in the Inuit teacher education program. Speaking with individuals or small groups, Tulloch prompted for the students' motivations, perceptions, challenges, successes, and hopes, and followed their lead in what they wanted to share. Conversations lasted about an hour; they were audio and videotaped, and later transcribed word for word. Tulloch also interviewed Moore and other program instructors and administrators. Those recorded conversations became additional research data.

The interviews were systematically analyzed using NVivo software. Using a data-driven, inductive approach, shared themes were identified then coded in each narrative. Students were invited to give feedback on analyses as they emerged. This approach is consistent with our goal of understanding what is working for the future teachers, on their own terms. The students' stories are told in their own words and voices in a documentary film resulting from the research (Tulloch *et al.*, 2017). In this article, we reflect back parts of the stories related to the opportunities or spaces for culturally-relevant learning. These spaces were: physical, relational, and ideological.

The research was approved by Research Ethics Boards at the University of Winnipeg and Memorial University, both of which follow the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. This document includes specific attention to respectful research relationships with Indigenous Peoples. The research was also reviewed and approved by the Nunatsiavut Government Ethics Board. Participants' names are used with permission.

## Findings

### Physical spaces

#### ***Community-based program***

The students' stories highlighted that one of the most important factors in making the program accessible to them was its location. Nunatsiavut is the most southerly and easterly region of the Inuit homeland in Canada, one of four regions making up Inuit Nunangat. About 2000 people, mainly Inuit, are spread between Nunatsiavut's five communities along the north coast of Labrador, accessible only by airplane, or by boat in summer and skidoo in winter. The provincial capital, St. John's, is over 1000 kilometres away, and requires at least one flight connection, generally in Goose Bay. Goose Bay is a hub about one hundred kilometres outside of the Nunatsiavut Inuit settlement area, with over 6000 people, about a quarter of whom self-identify as Inuit (Statistics Canada, 2017). Memorial University's Goose Bay campus, the Labrador Institute, hosted the Inuit Bachelor of Education (IBED) program.

The Goose Bay location opened teacher education up to potential Inuit teachers who were unwilling or unable to pursue higher education outside Labrador. Marina, a pre-service teacher in the IBED cohort, who is originally from Makkovik, Labrador, explained:

I've lived in Goose Bay for the last ten years. But the majority of our classmates did come from the north coast and did have to make sacrifices and uproot and move and even from the coast to Goose Bay, it's a big culture shock. [...]

[B]eing in Goose Bay, like central Labrador, you're always seeing people from home, or during the break it's so easy to go home. You're just a 45 minute plane ride away. Or people coming up for hospital appointments, you're always seeing people. So that was a big factor that drove a lot of us into the program too, rather than going to the city, and a giant campus, and not knowing your way around, and the traffic there compared to on the coast, and, I would much rather do it here in Goose Bay than St. John's. I don't think I would've really pursued my desire

to be a teacher or my desire wasn't large enough to bring myself to go to St. John's. But having it here really works.

Other students agreed: studying in Goose Bay allowed them to stay in a somewhat familiar space, and remain more accessible to their families than any other university program would have allowed. The smaller campus created specific spaces of belonging, as students had “their” room, in which most of their classes took place, and other Indigenous-specific spaces, such as the Indigenous student lounge.

The students' internship placements were also in Nunatsiavut communities. These internships motivated students, as they allowed more time at home (for some), and first-hand experience of the schools they were training to teach in. Jenni, who was also living in Goose Bay prior to the program, explained:

When I started [the IBED], I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a teacher, but I think the turning point for me too was when we were in Makkovik, just getting into the classroom, you can see how you can make those connections with the children, and with the schools and the people in the community, and it was something that I could see that...I could do for the rest of my career life. [...] I have a lot of experience in Makkovik, that's where a lot of my little boy's family is, and I've got good friends and good connections in that community, so that kind of helped me along. ... [G]rowing up, I found that like, you had your life and then you had school, and they were completely different compartments, in your life as you were growing up. And I don't like that. ... I want our schooling system to be able to appreciate the students for where they come from, and the experiences that they have outside of school. And that our learning should be related to that.

Jenni's comments, and comments from others, suggest that the community-based teacher education program is indeed laying a foundation for more community-centred education in Nunatsiavut communities.

### ***Land-based learning***

Offering the program in Labrador also kept the students in the familiar taiga landscape that has taught and sustained Nunatsiavut Inuit for centuries. Nunatsiavummiut speak of themselves as belonging to the land and say that the voices of their ancestors can be heard out on the land (Cunsolo Willox, 2014). Jenni explains “The land is so much more than just the ground we stand on; it's a feeling, a source of identity, and a way of life” (Moore and IBED Students, 2016). Inuit activist and educator Sheila Watt-Cloutier (2016) claims Inuit have always learned from the land:

As you are waiting for the ice to form and the snow to fall and the weather to improve and the animals to surface, you are being taught patience immediately. When you are out there taking survival-based risks, you are learning how to be courageous. You are learning how to deal with stressful situations; how to be bold under pressure. You are learning ultimately to develop sound judgment” (3:29–4:17).

The importance of land and place played a key role in the IBED as a culturally relevant and responsive education program. The students participated in traditional land activities such as dog sledding, ice fishing, and boil-ups during which elders shared explicit teachings like the knowledge of prevailing wind directions and river travel. As future teachers, it was imperative the students know how to use land-based pedagogy within the current curriculum. Sylvia Moore, the program's faculty lead emphasized:

... resources, the language, and the land's really important. So, any way that we can connect the land of Nunatsiavut with what they're doing in their courses is important ... For some classes are just out on the land, but also you can talk about the land and the cultural connection as they're learning to develop lesson plans...that's something that I always either challenged them with, or make a requirement for what I'm doing in my courses, which is in whatever way you decide, make sure there's a cultural component in there, or, make sure that there's a land connection. And, so, they're able to do that.

Felicia, a student in the program, gives this example of how she has learned to use the land as a resource in her future teaching:

We could learn about the growth and environmental surroundings of the berry bush in science class, engage students in reflecting on the activity and how they felt while they were doing it, or use it as an English-language arts project. We could create a history lesson, guided by the question, "How were these berries used before we had ovens and advanced cooking technology?" This simple, cultural activity opens up so many different learning opportunities. (Moore and IBED students, 2016)

The approach of learning from the land locates learning in a particular place and connects learners to the ways of knowing, doing, and being of the peoples who have lived in and on that land for a long time. Inuit and other Indigenous peoples describe a connection to the land through which the ice and land is not just a place, but a relationship to be fostered.

## **Relational spaces**

### ***Reciprocity and Relationship from Inception through Delivery***

Relationship and reciprocity are values that have underpinned the IBED since its inception and contributed to student recruitment, retention, and success. The vision for community-based and Indigenous education laid out by Memorial University's Presidential Task Force on Aboriginal Initiatives (2009) and the Canadian Deans of Education's Accord on Indigenous Education (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2010) emphasized relationship and responsiveness to Indigenous communities. Three years into the program, lead faculty member, Sylvia Moore reflected:

It's beyond what any one person could create. [...] it's who the students are, it's who the administrators are at the faculty of education, it's from Nunatsiavut's continued support in this. The ongoing conversations that I have with people such as Jodie, feedback from the

students. So it's not only co-created, it continues to be co-created ... It has taken on a life of its own and we're just a part of that.

The students reflected awareness of the openness of the “people who are in charge of the program”, as Joanne, one of the IBED students said:

We've met him [Kirk Anderson, Dean of Education] when we went to the [Inuit Studies] conference. You can see when they have the right heart, because it trickles down to the other levels and ultimately it comes to us. [...] Right away it was like, “We're going to talk to him.” So it really breaks down a lot of barriers.

Memorial University hired Sylvia Moore and sent her to Goose Bay prior to the program as the “the face of MUN's promise to establish a teacher education program...in Labrador” (Sylvia, in conversation). Sylvia's background as a scholar, a counsellor, an educator, and mom and grandma to Mi'kmaq children situated her to lead the program in a unique way, which made a big difference for the students' experiences. Sylvia described her background, saying:

It made me very sensitive to the kinds of things that children learn in school... There have been times when I had to do the unlearning piece and tell my children, what you just learned in social studies, what you're coming home and talking about, that's absolutely not true... And so I'm personally invested in Indigenous education ... my PhD from Lakehead University is in social-political contexts of education, but my focus was very much on Indigenous education, and my whole dissertation committee was made up of Indigenous scholars who were wonderful and very supportive.

Students explained that having one person—and the right person—as the face of the program, someone they could turn to academically and personally, was important to their success. Joanne reflected, and others agreed,

She understands our heart and how we feel about her ... she really is the heart of our program. ... She's like a guiding force. ... Trying to encourage us, and mentor us, and show us what we can be—the potential that we have as leaders.

Many other IBED instructors also modelled openness to the students in ways that engaged and inspired. Frank, another IBED student, expressed:

There's some instructors that reach out and they make the lessons personal to you. And you can always find something, something in the lesson, and you could bring it in to yourself, and then you connect to that, and you make the lesson your own. You get it, you understand it, it's a part of you. ... When you can make that connection, when those instructors make that connection with me, that inspires me to be a teacher, like I know I'm on the right path. This is what I'm meant to do. After 20 years of, “Which way am I going?” Well, now I know which way I'm going.

Relationships opened opportunities for students even before the program. The Nunatsiavut Government's education department had ongoing relationships with beneficiaries who might want



to become teachers. The personal invitation and encouragement that Nunatsiavut's Education Manager, Jodie Lane, offered was an important factor in recruiting and retaining students in the program. Doris, an IBED student, stated:

I heard about [IBED] a couple years before I started applying for the program, while I was a liaison working in the school in Hopedale. I was approached by Jodie ... and she ... said I'd be a good candidate for it, but at the time, I had just recently returned home from giving up on another course or program, so my confidence wasn't there. But she built me up, and I applied and got in.

From beginning to end, the role models and mentors in Memorial University and Nunatsiavut Government faculty and staff opened spaces within which students dreamed of becoming teachers, affirmed their dreams, and moved forward toward them. The importance of role models is observed in other Indigenous contexts, too, where individuals who have achieved success in higher education or careers say it is because someone they knew explicitly encouraged them into that role, because they had a role model to emulate, and because someone was encouraging them on (e.g. Tulloch *et al.*, 2015).

### ***Cohort Model***

The program had a single intake, and those students did their pre-program year together and then their whole program together. They took all of their courses in common. Consistent with Indigenous pedagogies, they learned in and through relationship. They supported each other through the challenges of post-secondary, sustaining a collaborative and non-competitive environment. Frank declared, "Everybody is concerned for everyone else and we all want each other to succeed and we all help each other and we go above and beyond to make sure everyone gets their assignment in and is prepared for an exam. Just supporting them." Roxanne, a fellow student, echoed, "It's like there's no competition between us, we're just working together."

Recruitment and retention are ongoing challenges in post-secondary education. The IBED program recruited 16 students to be part of the program, and 12 are preparing to graduate. Jenni asserted that the physical and relational spaces were key to hers, and her cohort's success:

To answer your question, it's three years or over three years and why am I still here? It's because of the people in my class and because of the support that I have outside of class, which I wouldn't have if I weren't in Labrador. So, the location, and then the people that I was fortunate enough to be in class with, those are the two reasons, really the only reasons that I'm still here.

Relationships that the students have built in and through the program are also equipping them to step forward as leaders in education. Cathy, another student, describes the impact of the instructors and student cohort:

As we started going through the program, and we had these instructors, and we had this wonderful class that was supporting us all the time. They want us to be leaders, they want

us to a better ourselves, they want us to take that next step that we're kind of afraid of going to, but we'll do it anyway because they're asking us to and they're encouraging us to ... We have all the support behind us. ... But, if I never had the group of students I have now and the instructors that I have now, I wouldn't have the confidence to feel like I could be a leader in the school. If I didn't have the friendship, all the help that I had throughout this whole program with my classmates and instructors, I wouldn't feel confident to think that I could be a leader. But with their help and their encouragement throughout the whole program I feel like I could.

The teaching and learning occurring in the IBED goes beyond the content of Memorial University's Bachelor of Education degree. Students are becoming leaders who will bring Inuit language and culture into schools, as envisioned in the National Strategy on Inuit Education (National Committee on Inuit Education, 2011).

### ***Relationship to Self***

The program also opened up relational spaces beyond the program, with implications for how the students see themselves and their place in their communities. Joanne discussed the impact:

It's more than just learning. It's about rediscovering yourself and creating yourself and learning who you are as a person and your identity as an Aboriginal person. ... [W]e're finding our own way, where we fit into the whole picture. ... So we're looking at everything through a different perspective and how to see it and be able to pass it on to the students who need to be able to sense that identity for themselves too.

Tracey shared how important the self-discovery is in the journey to becoming a teacher:

Sometimes it's very overwhelming, because there's the parts that I'm trying to fill in about identity. [W]e're going to be teaching kids, and I have to be me, I have to be authentically myself. 'Cause kids know when you're BS-ing them.

Tracey, like many of the other students, felt dislocated from her culture, as a result of early formal education in the North that deliberately alienated learners from their families, communities, culture, and language. It usurped the role of Elders as teachers and knowledge holders (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Jennifer Brant (2017), an Indigenous scholar of education speaks for decolonizing education, "where students can be their whole authentic selves and where their realities and lived experiences are positioned as strengths and key assets" (p. ii).

Sylvia Moore and the IBED students have described (2016) how they collaboratively re-centred Inuit knowledge and pedagogies in the university program. One aspect was teaching conversational Inuktitut. Many students had not had the opportunity to learn Inuktitut previously, and learning the language was an important part of equipping them practically as teachers, contributing to Inuktitut revitalization, and deepening students' sense of cultural connectedness. As Leroy Little Bear (2000) writes, "Language embodies the way a society thinks. Through learning and speaking a particular language, an individual absorbs the collective thought processes of a

people” (p. 78). Tracey reflected on the worldview that was opening up to her as she learned Inuktitut vocabulary and grammar:

I see different nuances. Like just the ways that the land is spoken about. And even looking at the way emotions are spoken of. ... [T]here’s a whole thing about two people in Inuktitut—if it’s two people your verbs and nouns change. ... There’s a real honouring of a one on one relationship, I find, that Inuktitut points to that.

Julie, like other students, revealed how learning the language is deepening her connection with her extended family:

My grandmother, she still knows some of the language, so me and her whenever we get a chance, we talk and stuff, and it’s really good because she gets really excited and the language, the Inuktitut just comes out of her, as if she’s talking all the time, like it’s really good.

The program also created connections with Elders and knowledge holders, incorporating them as instructors in the program. The students’ connections with the Elders who taught in their Inuktitut program, specifically, were a source of strength, and inspiration. Alanna affirmed:

Selma’s a big inspiration to me because she is bringing her knowledge to our classroom and hearing her speak is so enlightening. She is one of the people that I always talks to...she’s like one of your motivators, she’s like, “You’re doing so good now...I know your nan would be proud of you.” I know, I could just feel [Nan] there, like I can feel her, I just knows.

Finally, the program created opportunities for the IBED students to connect with other Inuit from the Inuit homeland across Alaska, Canada, and Greenland, for example when they gathered at the 2016 Inuit Studies conference. The students returned with a strong sense of connectedness to a collectivity much bigger than they had previously experienced. They felt more grounded in who they are (including in the variability in the way modern Inuit experience and express identity), and motivated to teach in ways that affirm Inuit learners. Julie, reflected:

[Y]ou start to realize how important culture is, and to put it in your education, when you see all Inuit, like Inuit from all around together, like talking, speaking one voice, and you all share this unity and this feeling for who you are. ... then we can share it with all of our children and just go from generation to generation like a ripple effect. Like people can feel the pride in who they are and their culture. [...] It really showed how we were connected to so many people in so many different ways without even knowing it. I remember one of the presentations or something was about all the different Inuit regions in Canada and I was kind of like, “How did I not know this?” And I think right from that point I thought about doing a lesson plan right then and there about all the different Inuit regions because we’re all connected, really, but do our students know that? I didn’t know that. ...So it was just like a big eye-opening thing to realize we were part of something huge.

Joanne added:

It really was that way, hey? There was a lot of comments made about how we felt proud of who we are. ... [I]t felt so amazing just to be able to sit there, in yourself, who you were, and just realize, "I'm fine here. I belong here" ... I don't have to think that I can't speak Inuktitut strong enough or I don't talk a certain way or look a certain way. It didn't matter. ... [W]e came here from the North coast and Goose Bay, and we were on the same page as people in the far North, for what we wanted in education. So that was exciting. Just realize that just because we're so isolated and so far apart, we really were on the same page, eh?

For the students, knowing themselves, and accepting themselves, and feeling a part of a broader Inuit was a healing journey they went on through the IBED. Their groundedness in their "authentic selves" (Brant, 2017, p. ii) equipped them to go boldly as Inuit educators, and to affirm the multifaceted identities of their future students. Rethinking what it means to be Inuk, and refusing discourses that had told them for years they weren't "Inuk enough" because they didn't look, or speak, or act in a certain way was part of the decolonizing journey students went on.

### **Cognitive spaces**

Through the program's design and implementation, those involved were deliberate about putting cracks in the "imperialistic system of knowledge" (Battiste, 2013, p. 107), and creating cognitive and ideological spaces in which the hegemonies of western formal education might be dismantled, and new ways of educating practiced. The National Strategy on Inuit Education (National Committee on Inuit Education, 2011) calls for post-secondary education that is "relevant to northerners, fosters a more robust civil society and space for critical development and inquiry" (p. 14). Instructors modelled cognitive openness as they critically, and sometimes transparently, considered what they taught and how they taught it. Lead faculty member Sylvia Moore explained:

Everyone who's come up to teach education courses from the main [MUN] faculty wants ... to teach in the way that the program's intended to support Inuit education. ... [I]t's not just the students learning in this, all of the instructors are as well including myself. ... [E]very one of them ... will say to me at the end ..., "This has changed my teaching in some way." And so it's very transformative ... for all of us.

The students learn through example and through explicit instruction to rethink pedagogy. As Jenni articulated:

[O]ne great thing about this program is that it's teaching us to kind of think out of the box. Which is hard when you come from ... something that's really Eurocentric. ... When I first got into this program I said, "Ok they're going to tell us, like, this is how you teach this subject". But, throughout the last three years, I've really realized that there is no one way to do it. And that if you're able to think outside of that box and kind of get away from that structured learning, you can delve into different things in the community and really relate it

to any curriculum. And that's one thing that we've kind of got to refocus the way that we think about education, and that's one of the things that we're learning in this program.

Frank agreed, "I've really come to embrace this new way of thinking about teaching and being a teacher...like my brain is rewired now."

In many different ways, the IBED program questioned normative assumptions about post-secondary education, pedagogy, and instructional content. Students who were used to post-secondary as competitive and hierarchical experienced it as collaborative and more egalitarian. The Inuit knowledge, knowledge holders, and language that had been pushed to the periphery were brought to the centre. Students re-thought curricular outlines, realizing their freedom in reaching outcomes through culturally relevant means. They rethought the concept of teaching resources. Felicia wrote:

We hear so often about the lack of resources available. ... Let us learn to think outside the box and look around us. Our environment provides endless resources that can easily be incorporated in every subject in the primary and elementary grade levels. Let us start taking these amazing resources that are readily available to us and create lessons that promote meaningful learning. (Moore and IBED Students, 2016)

The IBED has opened up the ways pre-service teachers view schooling and situated its graduates to also be those who open new spaces for learning among Inuit children.

## Discussion

Creating spaces for Inuit students to complete a B.Ed. is part of a much bigger challenge of engaging Inuit in post-secondary education. Abele and Graham (2010)'s literature review of success factors in Inuit post-secondary education concluded that insufficient research has been conducted to fully understand what is helping and hindering Inuit students' perseverance. Berger, Inootik, Jones and Kadjuk (2017) found that the "barriers that stop most Inuit youth from pursuing teaching ... are language, academic, financial, and family and housing related" (p. 3). Our findings reflect that geographic and relational factors impact students' willingness and ability to engage and succeed in teacher education, but other types of spaces need to be opened also, including cognitive and ideological spaces to question what is being taught and how.

Pulpan and Rumbolt (2008, p. 226) write about creating "institutional space" for Inuit knowledge in formal education. Creating space in the academia requires questioning which knowledges<sup>1</sup> are valued and transmitted, and who is seen as credible to pass on these knowledges. The IBED recognized a range of knowledge holders who would not often be seen as teachers in university programs. It also saw PhD professors stepping back to re-evaluate their knowledge and pedagogies, and to explicitly invite Inuit knowledge and pedagogies to stand on equal footing with Memorial's standard B.Ed. content and delivery. The IBED program has been successful

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the word knowledges is in recognition of the plurality of Indigenous knowledge systems.

specifically because it broadened the geographical scope in which Memorial's B.Ed. is offered, taking the program to the students, meeting them in or nearer to their home towns.

We have described three types of spaces that emerged as significant in the IBED students' experiences: the physical, the relational, and the cognitive/ideological. These are interconnected in the process of opening spaces for Inuit in Inuit education. The physical space is necessary for Inuit to be able to attend. The relational and cognitive spaces work together to help students stay, and ultimately become agents of change. Indigenous scholar Marie Battiste (2013) describes mainstream western education as a "rapidly flowing river", and acknowledges that although drastic change is needed to decolonize education, "if one fights against the current one usually drowns" (p. 107). The relational spaces created the support necessary to fight the current to create ideological change.

As one example, the students told the story of how as part of their first education course, they had discussed their personal experiences as students in the K-12 education system in which Inuit knowledge, culture and language were marginalized. They collaboratively developed then presented a submission for the Panel on The Status of Public Education in Newfoundland and Labrador. They declared, "Our schooling has done little to assist us in our sense of being Inuit and, in some cases, has taught us values that conflict with our traditional practices, such as valuing individualism over community" (p. 1). Marina's recounting of the event underscores the strength of the cohort in mobilizing the pre-service Inuit teachers' voices:

[W]e all went. It was open to the public, but the majority of us went, hey? We went there as a class and Joanne stood up and read our paper we compiled. ... [T]hat night we all went up there and Joanne read it out to the panel for discussion and we all like stood up behind her, like, "We're here, we want to be heard."

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we have reflected back the stories the Inuit Bachelor of Education students tell about their first three years in the IBED program. Sto:Lo scholar Lee Maracle (1994) writes, "It takes a lot of work to delete the emotional and passionate self from story, to dehumanize story into 'theory'. So we don't do it" (p. 89). In this vein, our analysis is not a generalizable theory of promising practices, but a window into remarkable students in an innovative program. The Association of Canadian Deans of Education (2010) set a vision, "that Indigenous identities, cultures, languages, values, ways of knowing, and knowledge systems will flourish in all Canadian learning settings" (p. 4). The Inuit Bachelor of Education has opened spaces where these are flourishing. It has fostered pre-service teachers' identities, cultures, languages, values, and ways of knowing, and taught them ways to foster these in the K-12 system. In documenting these stories, this research aims to contribute to our understanding of practices that support the emergence of strong Inuit educational leaders.

An open question is if and how these teachers will continue to hold open these relational and cognitive spaces once they are working in Inuit schools, possibly as the only Inuk teacher in their community. The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's 2017 Inuit Education Forum identified the isolation of Inuit teachers as a core challenge to educational change in Inuit Nunangat (Snow, Tulloch, Ochalski, and O'Gorman, 2018). Case studies of Indigenous teacher training programs offered in many iterations show that innovations introduced in teacher training are not always carried through into the teachers' practice (Whitinui, Rodriguez de France, and McIvor, 2018). How will these pre-service teachers have the support they need to continue decolonizing their minds, and decolonizing teaching practices when they start teaching in the coming years? How will they hold open these spaces for Inuit-specific, culturally-infused teaching and learning that the IBED has created? Ongoing work is needed to decolonize all teaching and learning spaces so that these teachers can be part of the transformation for which they are being equipped.

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