



Teacher Candidates' Expectations: Equity Education, Critical Literacy, and Indigenous Students' Epistemologies

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Abstract

Culturally responsive teachers respond positively to students' cultural norms and traditions by creating inviting and meaningful learning opportunities that distinguish between Indigenous and western perspectives; however, in classrooms where teachers' understanding of Indigenous epistemologies and worldviews are not necessarily sufficiently represented, Indigenous students not only often feel marginalized and isolated but disengaged from Eurocentric curriculum and texts that fail to incorporate their histories and traditions. This study focuses on the expectations and perceptions of teacher candidates (prior to their field practicum experiences in classrooms) related specifically to equity education, reflective practice, and critical literacy. The mixed-methods study examines prospective teachers' perceptions of issues related to Indigenous students, and how public education policy and practice manifests in classrooms. The findings suggest that prospective teachers are doubtful of the fact that Indigenous voices are being presented competently to enhance student learning and foster Indigenous student identity. Moreover, prospective teachers anticipate a fundamental disconnect between the Ontario policy outcomes related to Indigenous education and the practice of teachers in school.

Introduction

The Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) has published various policy documents and complementary resources targeted specifically at closing the achievement gap between Indigenous and other learners and improving the experiences of Indigenous students in provincially funded kindergarten to grade 12 public schools. The *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (OME, 2007c) identified the need to focus significant attention on Indigenous student achievement and specified the roles and responsibilities of school boards, school administrators, teachers, and the OME itself, to better address the unique learning styles and

preferences of the over 69,000 Indigenous students enrolled in provincial schools. The policy framework lists specific goals to improve Indigenous student achievement, reduce achievement gaps, and instill high levels of public confidence in these initiatives. Since then, the OME's two complementary documents, *A Solid Foundation: A Second Progress Report on the Implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2013) and the *Implementation Plan: Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2014) have shared the outcomes stemming from the policy framework (OME, 2007c), and identified additional interventions and measures to achieve the respective goals. The impetus for the policy, to some extent, may be the result of mainstream education practices that historically have accounted neither for Indigenous content nor Indigenous epistemologies in public schools (Kanu, 2011; Madden, Higgins, & Korteweg, 2013).

For clarification, publicly-funded K–12 education is a provincial responsibility in Canada, whereas schools on reserves are administered by a delegated governing body. There has been a dramatic increase of Indigenous student enrolment in Ontario public schools, making it paramount that teachers, as the frontline instructors in the classroom, are most responsive to Indigenous students' diverse learning needs (Cherubini, 2014a). Teachers' pedagogy and the learning environment they create in the classroom has a significant influence on student achievement and engagement (see Cherubini, 2016; Pearson, 2011; Sarra, 2011).

This study focuses on the expectations and perceptions of teacher candidates (prior to their field practicum experiences in classrooms) related specifically to equity education, reflective practice, and critical literacy as reflected in the OME (2007c) policy framework. The mixed-methods study discusses participants' responses to seven Likert-scale statements and to one open-ended question. The study examines prospective teachers' perceptions of issues related to Indigenous students, and how public education policy and practice manifests in schools and classrooms (Hardwick, 2015; Snively & Williams, 2006).

This study recognizes that it is important that prospective teachers acquire an understanding of how policy discourses can shape pedagogical practices, influence student dynamics in the classroom, and impact upon students' individually and collectively. The research project provided teacher candidates with an opportunity to trace their expectations and subsequent experiences before and after their coursework and practicum teaching assignments so that they can more accurately account for the development (Dillon, O'Brien, Sata, & Kelly, 2011; Wolsey et al. 2013) and understanding of concepts related to literacy instruction in public schools (Ball, 2012; Gee, 2008; Hamilton, 2014).

Context of the Study

As Perso (2012) and Yunkaporta (2010) discuss, culturally responsive teachers respond positively to students' cultural norms and traditions by creating inviting and meaningful learning opportunities that distinguish between Indigenous and western theoretical perspectives (Black, 2011; McKnight, 2015); however, for some pre-service teacher candidates (as well as experienced and practicing teachers), understandings of Indigenous epistemologies and worldviews are not

necessarily sufficiently developed (Harrison, 2012; McKnight, 2016), leaving Indigenous students not only often feeling marginalized and isolated in public schools (Feir, 2016) but disengaged from Eurocentric curriculum and texts that fail to incorporate meaningfully their histories, knowledges, and traditions (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Richards & Scott, 2009). The process of better understanding Indigenous paradigms may foster a sense of critical reflection in prospective teachers, including an awareness of the complexity involved in deconstructing one's biases and assumptions (Brown, 2017; Cherubini, 2014b; Kasun & Saavedra, 2016). This supports the view that teachers need to consider themselves as critical professionals able to navigate the socio-political and academic issues that relate to equity education (Buehl & Fives, 2009; Cole, 2011).

Reflection, in these terms, is a self-transformative process that includes a critical examination of teacher candidates' perceptions of their teaching practices and beliefs, and a capacity to reflect upon the implications of students' identities in their classrooms (Casewell, 2007; Reed, 2009). As an ongoing and evolving process, teacher candidates are well-served to consider what they believe to be relevant to teaching, including those aspects that relate to their professional development, competencies and beliefs (Korthagen, 2004). As Nixon, Packard, and Douvanis (2010) conclude, teachers' professional dispositions affect the values related to ethics and social justice (p. 48). It is very important thus to focus on preservice teachers' expectations and then experiences during their teacher education since they may hold rather romanticized notions of teaching, based potentially on their own experiences as students in the respective public schools they attended (Williams, Lin, & Mikulec, 2016). This paper, as one of several others, investigates preservice teachers' perceptions of equity and literacy education in light of Indigenous students' diversity in the context of provincial policy. The research examines teacher candidates' expectations of how Indigenous culture and worldviews will influence their teaching, and their positionality (including race, gender, and SES) on issues of power and hegemony, dominant cultures and epistemologies, and ultimately, racial and cultural divides. The intent is to develop both pre-service teachers' agency to engage in more genuine processes of self-reflection, and account for literacy education in their classrooms (see Liggett & Finley, 2009).

The current study is premised on the belief that Indigenous knowledge and worldviews must be recognized and acknowledged in public schools and incorporated meaningfully into teachers' pedagogy. Such a premise resonates with the goals and objectives of the policy framework (OME, 2007c) and underscores the literature that endorses the meaningful place of Indigenous students' epistemologies in public education (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015). The study recognizes that literacies evolve and respond to socio-cultural and socio-historical change, and that the specific nature of such responses may differ in each school and classroom (Kellner, 2004). Literacies, in this context, are far more involved than merely decoding signs and words into patterns, as they instead translate into meaningful relationships and discourses between individuals and texts (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). For Gee (1991), such critical discourses implicate more than language since

what is important is not language, and surely not grammar, but saying (writing)–doing–being–valuing–believing combinations.... Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities (p. 3).

The OME policy documents cite critical literacy as the examination of texts beyond the literal message, and the proficiency to notice both the explicit content and meaning of what is taught and what is implied (Expert Panel on Literacy in Grades 4 to 6 in Ontario, 2004). According to the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2007a) Grade 9 and 10 English curriculum documents, "literacy is about more than reading and writing – it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture" (p. 3, as cited in UNESCO, 2003). Literacy development is embedded across all subjects in the Ontario curriculum since critical literacy incorporates higher-level thinking skills that enable students to comprehend and evaluate texts and become reflective learners (OME, 2007a).

Methodology

The sample of this study consisted of teacher candidates enrolled in a professional teacher education program at a university in Ontario, Canada. Participants self-identified their respective demographic, including gender, socioeconomic class and program of study. The demographic data were compared across groups. Particularly because most of the participants identified as *Canadian-White* (71.7%), *female* (79.7%), and of *middle socio-economic* class (82.1%), various interpretations of the findings were considered. The on-line survey was administered in September 2017, prior to teacher candidates' practicum-related assignments in public-school classrooms. The post-survey, the results of which are not discussed in this paper, was administered to the same sample of participants at the completion of their teacher education program. The pre-survey was completed by 212 prospective teachers.

Participants were enrolled in one of two teacher education programs at the time of this study. The *concurrent education* program consists of students that have already completed the first four years of a five-year program of study. The fifth year consists solely of teacher education courses. Students proceed to the fifth and final year without having to apply for admission into the program. The *consecutive education* program accepts students that already have an undergraduate degree and are admitted to the first of a two-year Bachelor of Education program. Both programs of study allow students to be qualified in one of the following divisional pairings: primary/junior (kindergarten to grade 6), junior/intermediate (grades 4 to 10), and intermediate/senior (grades 7 to 12).

The survey consisted of 20 Likert-scale statements (ranging from 1=*Strongly Disagree* to 5=*Strongly Agree*) and four open-ended questions. This analysis includes participants' responses to the following seven quantitative statements, and to one of the open-ended questions. The Likert-scale statements included in this analysis are:

1. I believe that the demands of “standardization” will make it difficult to engage with issues related to Aboriginal education in my classroom during my practice teaching.
2. I believe that equity education as it relates to Aboriginal issues will be a meaningful complement to the provincial curriculum during my practice-teaching.
3. I believe that the capacity to reflect on my daily practice as a student-teacher will help to develop a deeper self-awareness during my practice teaching.
4. I believe that Aboriginal literature (novels, poetry, short stories) will already be meaningfully represented in the classrooms where I will be practice teaching.
5. I believe that Aboriginal literature (novels, poetry, short stories) will already be accurately taught in their respective historical, social and cultural contexts in the classrooms where I will be practice teaching.
6. I believe that Aboriginal non-fiction (documentaries, memoirs, traditional teachings) will already be meaningfully represented in the classrooms where I will be practice teaching.
7. I believe that Aboriginal non-fiction (documentaries, memoirs, traditional teachings) will already be accurately taught in their respective historical, social and cultural contexts in the classrooms where I will be practice teaching.

The responses to the following open-ended question were also examined: *The Ontario Ministry of Education English and Language Curriculum documents recognizes that literacy skills can foster a strong identity and positive self-image for students*. An objective of the Ontario Language and English curriculum (2006, 2007a, 2007b) is to develop students’ critical literacy skills that encourages them to ask probing questions and challenge the status quo while examining issues of power and justice. In this way, the curriculum empowers students to be critical about “issues that strongly affect them” (OME, 2006, p. 29). Such a question might be, “do you imagine that this will be true for Aboriginal students in the classrooms and schools where you will be practice teaching? Why? Why not?”

The research study included a mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Participants’ perceptions were measured according to the Likert-scale survey responses. The open-ended question served as an opportunity for participants to explain and develop the perceptions they may not otherwise had been able to express in the numerical survey responses (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). Participants’ demographic data were analyzed by frequency. The scores on the Likert-scale responses to the seven statements were analyzed by frequency and mean and compared across categories. Grounded theory was used to analyze and code the qualitative responses (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to the process of using grounded theory, participants’ responses were considered initially as an independent text, and then coded on a line-by-line basis. The principal investigator and an independent researcher analyzed the respective patterns grounded in the data and coded them in light of the emerging themes. The data and preliminary findings were subjected to comparison across groups. The findings were triangulated through a comparison of key words, phrases and themes. The properties of descriptors were subsequently compared, and the complete text of responses analyzed once more. The findings

were coded by category. Only those categories that theoretically saturated the data were identified (Charmaz, 2006).

Findings

Nearly 72% of respondents ($n = 152$) identified themselves as *Canadian - White*, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Frequency of Participant Self-Identification by Ethnicity

Ethnic Category	<i>n</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Aboriginal	1	0.5	0.5	.5
Canadian - Black	2	0.9	0.9	1.4
Canadian - White	152	71.7	72.0	73.5
European	21	9.9	10.0	83.4
Caribbean	1	0.5	0.5	83.9
Middle Eastern	6	2.8	2.8	86.7
South Asian	7	3.3	3.3	90.0
East Asian	7	3.3	3.3	93.4
Southeast Asian	2	0.9	0.9	94.3
South and Central American	4	1.9	1.9	96.2
Other	8	3.8	3.8	100.0
Total	211	99.5	100.0	
Missing	1	0.5		
Total	212	100.0		

Approximately 80% of the respondents were *female* ($n = 169$; 80%) as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Frequency of Participant Self-Identification by Gender

Gender	<i>n</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Female	169	79.7	80.1	80.1
Male	41	19.3	19.4	99.5
Other (please specify)	1	0.5	0.5	100.0
Total	211	99.5	100.0	
Missing	1	0.5		
Total	212	100.0		

Over 82% of the participants identified as *middle socio-economic* class ($n = 174$; 82.5%). See Table 3.

Table 3.
Frequency of Participant Self-Identification by Socio-Economic Class

Socio-economic class	<i>n</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Lower socio-economic	16	7.5	7.6	7.6
Middle socio-economic	174	82.1	82.5	90.0
Upper socio-economic	19	9.0	9.0	99.1
Other	2	0.9	0.9	100.0
Total	211	99.5	100.0	
Missing	1	0.5		
Total	212	100.0		

In terms of program enrolment, the most frequently occurring response was from those in the *Consecutive Education - Primary/Junior (P/J)* (32%), followed by the *Concurrent Education (I/S)* with almost 20 percent of the total, as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4.
Frequency of Participant Enrolment by Program

Program of study	<i>n</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Consecutive Education - Intermediate/Senior (I/S)	21	9.9	10	10
Consecutive Education - Junior/Intermediate (J/I)	26	12.3	12.3	22.3
Consecutive Education - Primary/Junior (P/J)	68	32.1	32.2	54.5
Concurrent Education (I/S)	42	19.8	19.9	74.4
Concurrent Education (J/I)	24	11.3	11.4	85.8
Concurrent Education (P/J)	30	14.2	14.2	100.0
Total	211	99.5	100.0	
Missing	1	0.5		
Total	212	100.0		

The distribution between participants in *Year 1* of consecutive education and *concurrent education* (Year 5) programs were nearly equally distributed—51.2% and 48.8% respectively. See Table 5.

Table 5.

Frequency of Participants by Current Year of Study

Year of study	<i>n</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Year 1	108	50.9	51.2	51.2
Concurrent Education (Year 5)	103	48.6	48.8	100.0
Total	211	99.5	100.0	
Missing	1	0.5		
Total	212	100.0		

Nearly half of the participants (48.6%) reported to agree (36.3%) or strongly agree (12.3%) with the expectation that the demands of standardization will make it difficult to engage with issues related to Indigenous education (see Table 6). Equally significant, 33% reported to be indifferent to this same expectation.

Table 6.

Frequency by Response to the Statement, *I believe that the demands of 'standardization' will make it difficult to engage with issues related to Aboriginal education in my classroom during my practice teaching.*

Response	<i>n</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Strongly Agree	22	10.4	12.3	12.3
Agree	65	30.7	36.3	48.6
Indifferent	59	27.8	33.0	81.6
Disagree	26	12.3	14.5	96.1
Strongly Disagree	7	3.3	3.9	100.00
Total	179	84.4	100.0	
Missing	33	15.6		
Total	212	100.0		

A more significant frequency of responses was reported with the second statement relating to prospective teachers' belief that equity education (in view of Indigenous issues specifically) will be a meaningful complement to the Ontario provincial curriculum. See Table 7.

Table 7.

Frequency by Response to the Statement, *I believe that equity education as it relates to Aboriginal issues will be a meaningful complement to the provincial curriculum during my practice teaching.*

Response	<i>n</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Strongly Agree	35	16.5	19.6	19.6
Agree	82	38.7	45.8	65.4
Indifferent	50	23.6	27.9	93.3
Disagree	10	4.7	5.6	98.9
Strongly Disagree	2	0.9	1.1	100.0
Total	179	84.4	100.0	
Missing	33	15.6		
Total	212	100.0		

The respondents that agreed with the statement (45.8%) represented the highest frequency, while 19.6% of the sample strongly agreed, totaling 65.4% that reported a favourable response. Yet, the second highest frequency of responses to this statement (27.9%) reported to be indifferent.

The frequency of favourable responses to the third statement was overwhelmingly positive (see Table 8).

Table 8.

Frequency by Response to the Statement, *I believe that the capacity to reflect on my daily practice as a student-teacher will help to develop a deeper self-awareness during my practice teaching.*

Response	<i>n</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Strongly Agree	84	39.6	46.9	46.9
Agree	76	35.8	42.5	89.4
Indifferent	13	6.1	7.3	96.7
Disagree	4	1.9	2.2	98.9
Strongly Disagree	2	0.9	1.1	100.0
Total	179	84.4	100.0	
Missing	33	15.6		
Total	212	100.0		

The statement inquired about participants' belief in their capacity to reflect on their daily practice to develop their self-awareness as a practice teacher during practicum. Over 42% of the participants agreed and 46.9% strongly agreed, representing a cumulative frequency of 89.4%. Only 1.1% strongly disagreed and 2.2% disagreed with the statement.

The trend of favourable responses was not consistent in the data for the fourth statement that asked about participants' expectation that Indigenous literature will already be meaningfully represented in the classrooms where they will be practice teaching (see Table 9).

Table 9.

Frequency by Response to the Statement, *I believe that Aboriginal literature (novels, poetry, short stories) will already be meaningfully represented in the classrooms where I will be practice teaching.*

Response	n	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Strongly Agree	15	7.1	8.4	8.4
Agree	37	17.5	20.7	29.1
Indifferent	58	27.4	32.4	61.5
Disagree	55	25.9	30.7	92.2
Strongly Disagree	14	6.6	7.8	100.0
Total	179	84.4	100.0	
Missing	33	15.6		
Total	212	100.0		

Slightly over 63% reported to be indifferent (32.4%) or disagreed (30.7%) with the statement. This cumulative percentage is significantly higher than the 29.1% cumulative percentage of responses that agreed (20.7%) and strongly agreed (8.4%) with the statement.

A similar trend emerged in the responses to the fifth statement, where 64% of the participants were indifferent (36%) or disagreed (28.1%) with the expectation that Indigenous literature was already being accurately taught in their respective historical, social, and cultural contexts in the classrooms where participants will be practice teaching (see Table 10).

Table 10.

Frequency by Response to the Statement, *I believe that Aboriginal literature (novels, poetry, short stories) will already be accurately taught in their respective historical, social and cultural contexts in the classrooms where I will be practice teaching.*

Response	n	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Strongly Agree	12	5.7	6.7	6.7
Agree	28	13.2	15.7	22.4
Indifferent	64	30.2	36.0	58.4
Disagree	50	23.6	28.1	86.5
Strongly Disagree	24	11.3	13.5	100.0
Total	178	84.0	100.0	
Missing	34	16.0		
Total	212	100.0		

Like the results from the previous statement, significantly less participants reported agreeing (15.7%) or strongly agreeing (6.7%), representing a cumulative average of 22.4%. In response to this statement, 13.5% of the total strongly disagreed, in comparison to 7.8% of responses that strongly disagreed with the previous one.

The trend of less favourable responses continued for the sixth and seventh statements (see Tables 11 and 12).

Table 11.

Frequency by Response to the Statement, *I believe that Aboriginal non-fiction (documentaries, memoirs, traditional teachings) will already be meaningfully represented in the classrooms where I will be practice teaching.*

Response	n	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Strongly Agree	16	7.5	9.0	100.0
Agree	24	11.3	13.5	91.0
Indifferent	70	33.0	39.3	77.5
Disagree	49	23.1	27.5	38.2
Strongly Disagree	19	9.0	10.7	10.7
Total	178	84.0	100.0	
Missing	34	16.0		
Total	212	100.0		

Table 12.

Frequency by Response to the Statement, *I believe that Aboriginal non-fiction (documentaries, memoirs, traditional teachings) will already be accurately taught in their respective historical, social and cultural contexts in the classrooms where I will be practice teaching.*

Response	n	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Strongly Agree	13	6.1	7.3	7.3
Agree	27	12.7	15.1	22.4
Indifferent	69	32.5	38.5	60.9
Disagree	48	22.6	26.8	87.7
Strongly Disagree	22	10.4	12.3	100.0
Total	179	84.4	100.0	
Missing	33	15.6		
Total	212	100.0		

In response to participants' belief that Indigenous non-fiction was already being meaningfully represented in the classrooms where they will be practice-teaching, 39.3% and 27.5% of the

participants indicated their indifference and disagreement respectively, representing a cumulative frequency of 66.8%. This frequency is significantly higher than the 22.5% of the total that agreed (13.5%) or strongly agreed (9%) with the statement. The results are nearly identical for the seventh statement where a cumulative 65.3% of the total were indifferent (38.5%) or disagreed (26.8%) with the belief that Indigenous non-fiction was already being accurately taught in their historical, social, and cultural contexts. Like the sixth statement, significantly fewer respondents agreed (15.1%) or strongly agreed (7.3%) with the statement, representing a cumulative 22.4%.

The qualitative analysis of the responses to the question that asked participants to speculate on the possibility that the OME curriculum empowers Indigenous students to be critical about issues that are most relevant to their lives and benefit from literacy skills that foster their strong identity and positive self-image resulted in the theoretical saturation of two categories, identified as (a) *teacher influence* and (b) *student advocacy*. The responses to the question were considered by both researchers across the variables of ethnicity, gender, SES, and program of study in which participants reported. The responses grounded in the data referred to how participants' speculations centered upon the specific context of each classroom learning environment, associate teacher, and of the Indigenous students themselves.

Discussion

In respect to the first Likert-scale statement, over 80% of the respondents from East Asia ($n = 7$), South Asia ($n = 7$), Black Canadians ($n = 2$), and the sole Indigenous participant agreed or strongly agreed—as did 50% of participants that reported to be Southeast Asian ($n = 2$). These participants expect that the standardization of provincial curriculum, assessment and evaluation policy, and large-scale testing will have a major influence on their potential to meaningfully engage with issues related to Indigenous education, and thus anticipate standardization to have an adverse consequence on their ability to account successfully for those topics that relate directly to Indigenous students. It can be inferred that these respondents, unlike the majority of those that identified as Canadian - White, anticipate difficulties in facilitating and coordinating opportunities to engage Indigenous students in their classroom because of their expectation of the demands that standardization will impose upon their practice. Moreover, the cohort that identified as middle SES were more likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement, in comparison to those that reported to be from lower and higher SES brackets.

Quite different from the findings of the first statement, most Canadian-White ($n = 152$), European ($n = 21$), and Middle Eastern ($n = 6$) participants agreed or strongly agreed with the second statement. Like the results from the first statement, Canadian-Black ($n = 2$) and East Asian ($n = 7$) participants agreed and strongly agreed with the second statement, as did approximately 50% of the Southeast Asian students ($n = 2$). Canadian-White and European participants tended to have a favourable response to the statement, suggesting that they perceive equity as a topic that will relate to Indigenous issues and complement the provincial curriculum. These participants expect equity to assume a viable position in the curricular spaces of provincial publicly funded schools, and trust that it will significantly complement their pedagogical practice. Unlike the other

groups, these participants have the impression that topics related to equity will be represented in the broader context of the issues that matter most to Indigenous students. Also, the respondents from the lower SES group presented the largest portion that agreed or strongly agreed with the student.

The favourable response rate for the third statement was significantly high (89.4% of the total either agreed or strongly agreed), except for the Middle Eastern participants ($n = 6$) that did not necessarily perceive their capacity to reflect on their daily practice as contributing to the development of their self-awareness. It will be worthwhile to compare these findings with the data from the post survey to distinguish if participants' actual experiences in classrooms during their practice-teaching assignments made a difference on their expectations of how standardization, equity education, and reflective practice implicate upon their perceptions.

For the fourth and fifth statements, focusing on participants' expectation that the presentation of Indigenous literature will be meaningfully and accurately represented in the classrooms where they will be practice teaching, nearly 65% of respondents reported not having an opinion or disagreeing. These participants did not respond favourably to the possibility that their associate teachers would create the necessary conditions in their classrooms to meaningfully and accurately represent Indigenous literature. The prospective teacher participants did not anticipate that the novels, poems, and short stories authored by Indigenous peoples will be properly presented in meaningful contexts to students. Interestingly, the East Asian participants ($n = 7$) and Indigenous participant ($n = 1$) were more inclined to agree with both statements. One cannot, however, base significant interpretations of this finding because of the small sample size. The fact that female respondents were more likely to disagree to both statements in comparison with male participants will be subject to further scrutiny in the post-survey analysis, as will the finding that the respondents that identified in the upper SES category tended to agree far more than those from the other two classes.

Similar findings emerged in response to statements six and seven that inquired about participants' expectations that works of Indigenous non-fiction will be meaningfully represented and taught accurately in the classrooms where they will be practice teaching. Here too, over 65% of the total reported not having an opinion or disagreeing with the two statements. It is significant that less than 20% had a favourable response to the sixth statement, and 22.4% agreed or strongly agreed to the seventh statement. The European participants ($n = 21$) tended to either agree or be indifferent to the sixth statement, while Canadian-Black participants ($n = 2$) and Middle Eastern ($n = 6$) respondents reported their disagreement. The Canadian-Black and majority of Middle Eastern and East Asian participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the seventh statement, while European and Southeast Asian participants tended to either agree or be indifferent. Female participants were more inclined to disagree or strongly disagree to both statements.

In respect to the last statement, respondents from the lower SES bracket tended to disagree more than those from the other two classes. Considering the findings for both the sixth and seventh statements, it can be suggested that many participants expect that the meaningful and accurate representation of Indigenous documentaries, memoirs, and traditional teachings will be rather elusive realities in the classrooms where they will be practice teaching. Participants' perceptions

point to a significant contradiction between policy and practice, since they anticipate that there will be a fundamental disconnect in how works of Indigenous non-fiction are represented in public school classrooms. While the OME policy goals and objectives call for both a substantial and relevant infusion of Indigenous worldviews, these teacher candidates anticipate a discord in how Indigenous traditions, cultures, and perspectives are being taught.

The overall findings of the Likert-scale responses point to rather pronounced implications. Prospective teachers are doubtful of the fact that Indigenous voices (in works of fiction and non-fiction) will be presented competently to enhance student learning and foster Indigenous student identity (see Rahm, Lachaine, & Mathura, 2014), impacting upon the historical and political positions of Indigenous peoples in general, and upon the Indigenous learners specifically in each classroom (see Cammarota, 2011; Kirshner, 2010). One can infer that the prospective teacher participants in this study anticipate that the ideological framing of Indigenous literature (including works of non-fiction) will have adverse effects on the contextual and social constructions of Indigenous worldviews and Indigenous student identities (Paris & Alim, 2014). The findings suggest that participants are concerned with the intersections between how Indigenous fiction and non-fiction are represented, the accuracy of these representations, and how Indigenous students' identities and literacy experiences are unfavorably affected in public school classrooms (Caraballo, 2016). Moreover, while some participants anticipate equity education to complement the provincial curriculum and that their capacity to self-reflect on their daily practice will develop their self-awareness, it is troubling that many respondents perceive that Indigenous literature and worldviews will be positioned in less than ideal discourses across public school classrooms, and therefore will have negative interpretations on Indigenous students' academic and cultural identities (Kinloch, 2010; Paris, 2012). Participants anticipate that such culturally-appropriate and meaningful inclusions of Indigenous worldviews (through fiction and non-fiction) do not exist—and hence a principle mandate of Ontario Indigenous education policy is not being addressed. As a result, prospective teachers expect that students' genuine engagement in the meaningful explorations of their identity and cultures (for all, and not just Indigenous students) is not being enacted in public school classrooms (Schroeter & James, 2015).

There are also several noteworthy findings grounded in the two core categories that emerged from participants' qualitative responses to the question that asked them to discuss their expectation that Indigenous students will have opportunities to develop their literacy skills and be empowered to be critical about the issues that strongly affect them. The first category, identified as *teacher influence*, included responses that cited the condition that classroom teachers would have to be receptive to creating these opportunities otherwise: "Aboriginal students [will be] left out of the conversation...either forgotten entirely or alienated" (anonymous concurrent I/S participant). If teachers are willing to create nurturing literacy experiences for students, then as this participant wrote and was typical of other responses, "it will empower them [Indigenous students] to better understand and critique texts that represent Aboriginals" (anonymous concurrent I/S participant). Others suggested that they "would like to think that this will be true" (anonymous concurrent P/J participant) despite the fact that they expect "a limited amount of support given to students due to the lack of education of teachers in Aboriginal studies"

(anonymous concurrent I/S participant). Some respondents cited the difficulty they expect teachers to have in appropriately and accurately representing Indigenous students' interest to challenge the status quo and examine issues of power and justice because "it is difficult to understand something when you have no way of positioning yourself in terms of it, or even relating to it" (anonymous consecutive J/I participant). Participants believe that if teachers themselves feel uneasy with the issues of representation and social justice, then this serves to prompt even more complicated feelings of uncertainty and less confidence to structure meaningful and relevant learning and literacy opportunities. In these contexts, the prospective teachers expect to feel saddled with a responsibility to navigate sociohistorical and socio-cultural terrains that may be relatively foreign to them. Hence, they anticipate the difficulty for teachers to integrate conceptual notions of critical literacy into meaningful classroom discourses if the issues most relevant to Indigenous students are not part of teachers' more mainstream discourse. This could explain why many respondents cited their own experiences as K–12 students to explain the priority they place on teachers' influence. Some stated that empowering Indigenous students' critical voices "was not prominent while I was in school" (anonymous concurrent J/I participant), while another stated, "I am not fully confident because from my prior experiences...all students would be encouraged to examine the issues of power and justice from very similar viewpoints" (anonymous concurrent P/J participant). Similarly, common among the responses were references to teachers' ability and willingness to tailor the standardized curriculum to meet the critical literacy needs of Indigenous students. The following response is indicative of several others: "The curriculum is targeted towards White middle-class students and although there are prompts [for teachers] to include Indigenous resources in the classroom, I [expect] that they are not implemented" (anonymous concurrent I/S participant). In a similar light, respondents suggested that the individual teacher's influence in the classroom will determine the possibility of "open dialogue [that] contributes to understanding" (anonymous consecutive P/J participant), and only "as long as the associate teacher applies [themselves] effectively to the issue" (anonymous concurrent J/I participant). This concurrent P/J participant response represented several others:

Aboriginal students may have questions about the issues that affect them, but it does not mean that they will be answered. Many teachers will not speak about history that is not strictly European-Canadian, so they [Indigenous students] won't feel comfortable to talk about their own history and issues.

For many participants, they "hope" that Indigenous students will develop strong critical literacy skills but recognize that the probability of this happening is largely dependent upon "the teacher try[ing] to incorporate all backgrounds into lessons" (anonymous consecutive P/J participant). Participants' responses are reflective of the literature that endorses the view that teachers need to be reflective of how their pedagogy resonates with the individual particularities of each learner in their classroom (Flores, 2008; Murray-Orr & Mitton-Kukner, 2017). It speaks directly to the research that suggests that successful teachers account simultaneously for content and pedagogical practices with professional and personal points of view (Collins-Gearing & Smith, 2016).

Participants' expectations align with the literature that suggests that for teachers to reflect upon both their practice and understanding of the issues that resonate most with Indigenous students, they need to welcome and invite what Golden and Womack (2016) refer to as "strength-based models of literacy education" (p. 36) in order to first better interpret the issues of power and justice that impact upon Indigenous students, and second, to maximize their relevance in the classroom. In this way, teachers consider what can be learned from the lives and literacies of Indigenous students, and how their own practice can serve to affirm and strengthen these identities.

The second category that was grounded in participants' responses is identified as *student advocacy*. In many instances, participants expect that the possibility for Indigenous students to be empowered to think critically about issues most relevant to their lives will "depend on the population of Aboriginal students in the class and school" (anonymous concurrent I/S participant). Respondents expect Indigenous students to advocate for the critical consideration of power and justice in the general classroom discourse. Some Indigenous students "may enjoy exploring certain critical lenses" (anonymous concurrent I/S participant), while others "may be more aware of social justice issues" (anonymous consecutive P/J participant), but usually, participants clarified that Indigenous students "must feel welcome and have a voice" in the classroom and school environment (anonymous consecutive P/J participant). In these ways, participants expect that if the proper conditions exist for Indigenous students to self-advocate, then "it gives them an opportunity for their voices to be heard and to think critically as to how they can change the status quo" (anonymous concurrent P/J participant).

Most telling, however, were the responses that suggested, like this one, that self-advocacy remains very problematic because "issues for Aboriginal students are hidden" in the culture of public school (anonymous consecutive P/J participant). In school and learning environments that stifle Indigenous students' self-advocacy, a significant number of participants expect that Indigenous students "may only see themselves reflected as victims" if there are not spaces "that allow them to feel empowered and proud of their people's strength, resilience, and capabilities" (anonymous concurrent P/J participant). Several of the concurrent I/S participants drew their observations from what they suggest is the lack of meaningful Indigenous fiction and non-fiction in secondary school classrooms. Like others, this I/S participant stated that "there are not that many texts offered in classrooms that are written by Aboriginal writers...I think it would be hard for Aboriginal students to feel empowered when they are not represented." Another respondent wrote, "Aboriginal students will not be at the same advantage as the majority of students [and have a limited] gateway to communicating" (anonymous concurrent I/S participant). Participants perceive Indigenous student self-advocacy in the larger social and epistemic context of schooling and expect that Indigenous students will not have equitable opportunities to express their voices and create multiple meanings to complex issues in school environments that invite and honour their voices. While most respondents recognize that teachers will focus on social injustices, an equal number suggest that these topics of discussion and learning "will not directly affect Aboriginal students" (anonymous concurrent I/S participant) because issues of hegemony and equity as they are considered from Indigenous perspectives "are not typically discussed in classrooms" (anonymous concurrent I/S participant). Thus, the onus seems to be placed on Indigenous students to self-

advocate. As this consecutive P/J participant stated, the “correct questions” must be asked but only if Indigenous students “want to talk and have had good experiences in the education system up to now” (anonymous consecutive P/J participant). According to some participants, the possibility for Indigenous learners to engage in meaningful and critical considerations of literacy-related topics “depends upon each individual student” (anonymous consecutive I/S participant). Participants, to a large extent, place the burden of responsibility to advocate on the same demographic of students that have been historically marginalized in public education. This may lead one to wonder if such expectations are an extension of colonial practices that ignore Indigenous students’ historic misrepresentations, including having been marginalized and silenced in public schools (Cherubini, 2017; McKegney, 2014). This would seem a far cry from decolonizing the traditional political, social, and epistemic practices that have been characteristic of mainstream schools, and from availing all Indigenous students to opportunities to develop their critical voices from positions of struggle and resilience (see Pirbhai-Illich, 2013). Participants also worry that if only a few Indigenous students assume active roles as advocates, that it will create “difficult [circumstances that will] single out students based on their heritage” (anonymous concurrent I/S participants) and only further contribute to their marginalization. Conversely, if there is a lack of self-advocates, many respondents expect that the focus on critical literacy, as it relates to Indigenous students’ perceptions of power and justice, “will be overlooked” (anonymous concurrent P/J participant). Time and again, the teacher candidates indicated their belief that the possibility for Indigenous students to be empowered in classroom discourses “will vary for each student on an individual basis” (anonymous consecutive P/J participant), as many recognized that it “could be very difficult for an Aboriginal student to feel supported, understood, and connected to peers” (anonymous consecutive P/J participant). Some suggested that they expect public schools to default by ignoring critical literacy as it is described in the question because “it is simply easier not to discuss” it (anonymous concurrent J/I participant) and hence, “Aboriginal students will not be empowered” (anonymous concurrent J/I participant). According to some participants, this will be especially true for students in public schools where they do not “have an icon with whom they can identify” (anonymous concurrent I/S participant) and take inspiration from to self-advocate.

Conclusion

The OME’s policies and documents related to improving the educational experiences and achievement of Indigenous students includes the meaningful incorporation of their epistemologies and worldviews in public schools and classrooms. Teachers are commissioned to ensure that Indigenous students have an equitable voice and that classroom practices are respectfully inclusive. A component of this inclusivity is in the meaningful incorporation and representation of Indigenous literature (both fiction and non-fiction) to empower students in a critical literacy framework.

This study encouraged prospective teachers to examine and reflect upon their expectations in light of the above considerations prior to their practice teaching assignments. As discussed in this paper, several of the findings are troubling since prospective teachers expect a fundamental

disconnect between the outcomes of the policy framework and the actual practice of teachers in school. Issues related to historical presentation, equity and social justice are expected to be incorporated relatively ineffectively in public school classrooms. Participants expect that practicing teachers will have to be committed to complementing the intended curriculum of provincially funded schools with informed post-colonial perspectives that allow all students to appraise, critique, and develop their literacy skills. Yet, prospective teachers also expect Indigenous students themselves to self-advocate in learning environments that are unresponsive to their needs and interests. In these instances, participants may not consider thoughtfully the potentially confusing and overwhelming circumstances experienced by some Indigenous students.

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