



An Arctic encounter with Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth as pedagogy for historical consciousness and decolonizing

Heather E. McGregor

University of Ottawa, Canada

ABSTRACT: In this article I reflect on a pedagogical encounter that occurred during my research with a program called Students on Ice, a ship-based expedition to the Arctic with youth and adults, including a large number of Indigenous Northerners. Together, we visited a National Historic Site and confronted part of Canada's history of colonization. I frame this powerful pedagogical encounter with Dwayne Donald's (2012) theory of decolonizing education, wherein processes of decolonizing and historical consciousness are deeply linked. I work to identify the dimensions of this encounter that produced such a powerful learning opportunity in service of both historical consciousness and decolonizing. I found that as students learned how people are differently historically conditioned, they did not resort to voyeuristic distance, but rather recognition of connection, and from that, "ethical relationality" (Donald, 2012) may flow.

KEYWORDS: history education; Indigenous studies; decolonization; Arctic; Students on Ice.

Introduction: Questions about Decolonizing and Historical Consciousness

Widespread conversations about Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations are resulting in significant changes to public school programs, post-secondary institutions, and other, even non-formal, learning contexts in Canada. Some changes were inspired or bolstered by the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).¹ For example, the TRC issued concrete Calls to Action, such as for new history curricula in schools. This call is one, albeit important, part of the increasing consensus that educational change must reference Indigenous peoples' histories, and at the same time, exposure to Indigenous histories contributes to educational change. Such efforts raise questions of historical consciousness, or how we understand links between the past, present and future. They also raise questions of decolonizing, or what it looks and feels like to pursue learning goals that depart from colonizing legacies, and what counts as *enough* change in educational settings (see also McGregor, 2017a).

It is important to acknowledge that for many Indigenous educators, scholars and leaders these conversations—about the relationship between history and decolonizing education—are not new, even if they are reaching wider audiences now. Elsewhere (McGregor, 2015; 2017a) I engage with theory on decolonizing education from a broader selection of literature. Here, I focus attention on Dwayne Donald's (2012) contributions to

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theorizing why processes of decolonizing education are warranted and how to go about them in the Canadian context. I highlight his ideas about the myth of the fort or separation between Indigenous peoples and other Canadians, the perpetuation of colonial frontier logics, the purpose of confronting colonial histories with an eye to interconnections, and ultimately the pursuit of ethical relationality. These theoretical reference points provide a frame for the pedagogical encounter I describe, and the generative dimensions of pedagogy that I work to identify. My choice to focus on Donald's article, "Forts, colonial frontier logics, and Aboriginal-Canadian relations," is not intended to discount the increasingly voluminous literature on decolonizing education published in and outside of Canada. Instead, it is intended to closely attend to the kernels of meaning that emerged from placing this particular research and learning story within this particular theoretical frame.

Having read Donald's article in 2012, I wondered what pedagogy informed by this theory might look like and feel like. Unexpectedly in 2016, I found myself in the midst of just such a learning opportunity. Although the emergent pedagogy I describe here was not informed by Donald's theory in advance, I found that in retrospect his ideas could help me to make sense of its significance.

This encounter occurred during my research with a program called Students on Ice, a ship-based expedition to the Arctic with youth and adults, including a large number of Indigenous Northerners. Together, we visited a National Historic Site and confronted part of Canada's history of colonization. We witnessed the abandoned village of Hebron, a real place where evidence of colonization cannot be hidden or ignored. Our learning community—the people we arrived, visited and left with—included people, especially youth, directly impacted by that very history of colonization. The focus of our visit became the intergenerational effects of colonization, including the contemporary suicide epidemic in Inuit communities. The presence of the past in the lives and relationships of participants could not be denied. Being on a journey together also provided for percolation, or the opportunity for participants to return to thinking about their experience as it set in over the days and weeks afterwards, along with others who had experienced it too. Through comments from research participants I found that as they learned how people are *differently* historically conditioned, they did not resort to voyeuristic distance or settle into separate realities, but rather recognized *connection*, and from that, "ethical relationality" (Donald, 2012) may flow. Thus, my observations of this pedagogical encounter, and the conversations I had with youth who reflected on it through my research, help to enliven Donald's theory of decolonizing education.

Histories that convey separate realities and decolonizing education in Canada

The premise of Donald's (2012) article is that Canadians and Canadian education systems have not taken seriously the implications of colonialism for our shared society. He points to the prevalent and problematic assumption that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples inhabit separate realities, thus denying our multi-layered and long-time relationality in the country we have come to call Canada. I, too, am interested in Canadian tendencies towards constructing, or at least perceiving, separate realities within our borders. Perhaps this has been a survival tactic in such a huge country marked by significant regional differences, but it has also resulted in deep alienation on the part of those whose realities are marginalized.

In relation to the Canadian Arctic—the region with which I identify and where my research is based—at least three dimensions of separateness are at play: rurality and remoteness in contrast to urban life; predominantly Indigenous populations rather than non-Indigenous; and, Northern environments, in the real, geographic sense rather than the cultural sense (such as referring to Vancouver as Hollywood "North"), and their intense influence on human

experience. Sherrill E. Grace (2007) explores cultural and discursive evidence of this separateness through her book *Canada and the Idea of the North*. She notes a 1967 radio documentary by Glenn Gould, the famous Canadian musician, called “The Idea of North,” in which Gould, said:

I’ve been intrigued for quite a long time... by that incredible tapestry of tundra and taiga country... I’ve read about it, written about it occasionally, and even pulled up my parka and gone there. But like all but a very few Canadians, I guess, I’ve had no direct confrontation with the northern third of our country. I’ve remained of necessity an outsider, and the north has remained a convenient place to dream about, spin tall tales about sometimes, and, in the end, avoid. (Grace, 2007, p. xxv)

I suggest that a great deal of ignorance and intrigue, and very little “direct confrontation” as Gould puts it, characterizes most Canadians’ relationship with the Arctic even now. Questions of how to overcome perceptions of separateness, and the invisibility of Indigenous peoples, are very real for Arctic peoples for many reasons, not the least of which is their ability to bring attention to, and mediate, how climate crisis is already deeply affecting human lives (Watt-Cloutier, 2015).

Also speaking of confrontation, with regard to reforming Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations, Dwayne Donald (2012) suggests, “The possibility for decolonizing educational philosophies in Canada can only be realized through confrontation with contentious colonial legacies” (p. 93). Here Donald raises questions of historical consciousness—how the way we understand the past affects our perspective on the present and future. Using the example of the fur-trading fort, Donald shows how versions of history become not only interpretations of events, but they “morph into hegemonic expressions of existing value structures and worldviews of the dominant groups” (p. 95). Of the mythic national symbol of the fort, Donald says:

In Canada, the wildness of the land and the Indian are similarly valued, but there is also much pride in the ways the land was civilized and how civilization was brought to the Indians. The fort, as a colonial artifact, recapitulates the development myth of the Canadian nation by symbolizing this civilizing process—transplanting a four-cornered version of European development into the heart of the wilderness. (p. 95)

While there are few forts in Arctic Canada, there were both fur-trading posts and churches or mission stations of several denominations that defined the landscape—and humandscape—in new ways. Just as with forts, these posts and churches delineated where one could find, as Donald says, “civilized and industrious people working in the interest of building a new nation from *terra nullius*” (p. 100). The arrival and “gift” of Christianity to the Indigenous peoples was seen, and, many would argue, is still seen, as a civilizing, progressive, even ultimately charitable process of change. The remaining old Hudson’s Bay Company posts and churches stand across the Arctic as a testament to that hegemonic value structure and worldview.

The work of decolonizing education, according to Donald, involves confrontation with the past and revisiting history with an eye to interconnections. In his words:

The process of decolonizing in Canada, on a broad scale and especially in educational contexts, can only occur when Aboriginal peoples and Canadians face each other across deeply learned divides, revisit and deconstruct their shared past, and engage carefully with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together. What are required are curricular and pedagogical engagements that traverse the divides of the past and present. Such work must contest the denial of relationality by asserting that perceived civilizational frontiers are actually permeable and that perspectives on history, memory, and experience are connected and interreferential. (Donald, 2012, p. 102)

He goes on to describe the characteristics of ethical relationality that emerge from these pedagogical engagements to traverse the divides of the past:

[...] this form of relationality carefully attends to the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a person or community understands and interprets the world. It puts these considerations at the forefront of engagements across frontiers of difference. This concept of relationality instantiates an ethical imperative to acknowledge and honour the significance of the relationships we have with others, how our histories and experiences position us in relation to each other, and how our futures as people in the world are tied together. (p. 104)

In another of Donald's articles he describes the work of facing colonial histories as an "ethic of historical consciousness," saying, "This ethic holds that the past occurs simultaneously in the present and influences how we conceptualize the future. It requires that we see ourselves related to, and implicated in, the lives of those who have gone before us and those yet to come" (2009, p. 7).²

Thus, in this theoretical frame the goal of decolonizing education is to pursue ethical relationality through historical consciousness. The important constructs include coming to know the past differently, overcoming perceptions of separateness, and relational processes of reforming historical consciousness with decolonizing aims. It is important to note that Donald theorizes primarily from Blackfoot and Cree territory in what is now called the province of Alberta. What I have tried to show here is that some of the same constructs may translate, albeit with some adaptations, to Inuit territory in the Arctic, the context to which I now turn.

Context of confrontation with coloniality: Hebron, Nunatsiavut

Hebron was a Moravian mission station located on the north coast of Labrador, in a region now officially recognized as the Inuit homeland of Nunatsiavut. Hebron was established in the 1830s; not the first mission station in Labrador, but early in comparison to European settlement in other parts of Inuit territory across the Canadian Arctic. The German missionaries delivered religious instruction, supported Inuit language literacy, celebrated Christmas and Easter, started church bands and choirs, and provided medical and commercial services to Inuit. In turn, Inuit increasingly settled nearby the mission station, ultimately creating a permanent community. This situation continued for more than 100 years, and Labrador eventually became part of Canada in 1949.

In 1959 the provincial government of Newfoundland, which governed Labrador at the time, decided with the Moravians that supplying the remote location of Hebron was too expensive. During an Easter church service, community members were informed that they would be relocated elsewhere in Labrador. It is important to note that in the Moravian church dissent was not tolerated; thus Inuit were not consulted or given any choice in the matter. An Inuit leader wrote to the government begging not to be removed from the land those Inuit families knew as home, but he was not successful in his appeal. The relocation that followed was deeply painful, and the integration of Hebron families into other communities to the south was not well supported, causing what is now recognized as significant intergenerational trauma (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2016).

Hebron is an engaging place to visit, partly because of the site's natural beauty and the good possibility of seeing evidence of polar bears. The Moravian church and mission house are well-built, prominent buildings that remained partially intact despite abandonment. Hebron was declared a National Historic Site in 1976. In 2005 the Newfoundland & Labrador government officially apologized to the families who were relocated away from Hebron. In 2009 a monument was erected at Hebron, depicting the government apology and a response to the apology from affected Inuit. Over the past several years the Nunatsiavut (local Inuit) government has funded restoration of the mission house and church. Inuit families who continue to feel ancestrally connected to Hebron are voluntarily conducting this restoration

during the summer months, and taking care of the site. It is no longer decrepit or devoid of human connection.

To understand the story of Hebron, then, is to confront the early processes of missionary contact with Indigenous peoples in Arctic Canada and the gradual changes to Inuit life that followed. It is also to confront the manipulations of Indigenous lives by colonial governments in the 20th century under the welfare state, the complicity of the church in efforts to control Indigenous life on Eurocentric terms, and the drastic, deepfelt pain caused as people were forcibly disconnected from their homelands.

Pedagogical encounter: Taking youth to the Arctic

In the summer of 2016 I visited Hebron with 120 youth and 80 adults participating in a program called Students on Ice (SOI). SOI is a non-profit foundation based in Gatineau, Quebec that takes students aged 14-24 from around the world on ship-based educational expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctic. Over the course of SOI's history, since it was founded in the year 2000, multi- and interdisciplinary learning has increasingly characterized its education program. Whereas climate, environmental and biological sciences took centre stage in the past, more recent expeditions—especially to the Arctic—feature the arts (music, theatre, visual arts), social sciences (history, economic development, healthy communities) and Inuit culture (sewing, drumming, politics). The central aim of youth leadership development is deeply embedded in the themes of the education program and purpose of the expedition experience.

On Arctic expeditions, SOI strives for 30%, or greater, rate of participation by youth from the Arctic including Alaska, Canada (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik/Northern Quebec, Nunatsiavut/Labrador), Greenland or other circumpolar countries. I refer to these as the “Northern” youth, a majority of whom are Indigenous, mostly Inuit. On the expedition in 2016 there were 45 Northern youth, including 6 from the region of Nunatsiavut/Labrador, which we visited. Most Northern youth are between the ages of 16-18, and in 2016 there were 33 females and 12 males. I refer to the other 75 youth participants as “Visiting” students; they come from across Canada, the United States, and other countries around the world. SOI facilitates a robust funding program through which all Northern students are provided with scholarships, reducing cost barriers to participation. SOI also involves Inuit Elders, northern leaders, and northern residents as onboard staff.

SOI's program in 2016 involved a 2-day pre-program specifically tailored for Northern youth in Ottawa, followed by a 2-day pre-program for all youth participants and 80 staff. Then, the participants flew to Iqaluit, Nunavut where we embarked on the *Ocean Endeavour*, an ice-class cruise ship. The expedition lasted two weeks, and involved visiting the north Labrador Coast, crossing the Davis Strait and visiting multiple locations in southwest Greenland.

Researcher on board

I consider myself a Northerner in Canada, and that is largely how I came to conduct a research project with Students on Ice in 2016. I was born in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories and grew up in Iqaluit, Nunavut where my parents still live, the place I consider my “heart home.” I am non-Indigenous; my ancestors settled on lands now called Canada and the United States at the invitation of invading governments. My parents moved to the Arctic as young teachers in 1973 and have worked towards being allies to Indigenous peoples in education over the many years since then.

My academic studies have mainly focused on Inuit education in the eastern Arctic (now Nunavut), including educational history in the 20th century and analyses of decolonizing goals in the Nunavut school system in the 21st century. In general, my research has been concerned with documenting ways educational change can be pursued to enhance school responsiveness to the vision of education held by Inuit families and communities.

This research project came about soon after my parents and I travelled through the Northwest Passage with the tour company Adventure Canada on board the *Ocean Endeavour* (the same ship used by SOI) in the summer of 2015. Having travelled extensively, and considering myself knowledgeable about the Arctic, I was nevertheless deeply affected by the expedition. I became much more intensely aware of climate crisis, more sensitive to my own, and my parents' mortality, more in love with the Arctic, and concerned about making a meaningful contribution to addressing climate change through my research and work.

Shortly after this trip, I arrived at the University of Ottawa to begin my postdoctoral fellowship. Upon speaking about my cruise experience, several colleagues recommended I connect with Lisa (Diz) Glithero, former Education Director of SOI and now Adjunct Professor. Following an encouraging conversation with Diz I began to imagine a research project that would help me investigate the powerful learning experience I had tasted through my own expedition, while at the same time contributing to a program that is increasingly oriented to supporting Northern youth.

I proceeded to meet with SOI senior staff and the founder and Executive Director, Geoff Green. We discussed our shared questions and interests, and they considered my proposal to develop a research plan focused on the Northern youth experience on SOI. Following several more meetings we developed a research plan that was thought to be within scope, useful to SOI, and not disruptive to their program experience or culture, particularly for the youth who would have an opportunity to participate.

The research questions I asked are much larger in scope than the research story featured here conveys, but I share them here to provide context. I asked:

What dimensions of the SOI experience (before, during and after) have the most significant impacts on Northern youth and educators, especially in terms of (but not limited to):

- supporting personal growth, education and leadership skills?
- encouraging engagement with and ongoing dialogue regarding important Arctic issues, such as (but not limited to) climate change?

What dimensions of the SOI experience best facilitate learning from the perspectives of Northerners about the North?

Based on the experiences and perspectives of Northerners, how can SOI improve its programs to increase responsiveness to Northern peoples and communities?

To investigate these questions I used the following methods: participant observation throughout the entire duration of the expedition (including the Northern student pre-program), analysis of program documents collected by SOI (student applications and feedback forms), small group interviews with students, one-on-one staff interviews, workshops with students that produced reflective worksheets and follow-up phone interviews with students. More detail can be accessed through my final research report (McGregor, 2017b).

The youth perspectives shared later in this article came from small group interviews. The interviews were designed to provide youth participants with an opportunity to reflect on and describe their learning experiences during SOI. The interviews were held during supper, so that youth did not miss out on another activity in order to participate. Supper is a plated and served meal on the ship (as opposed to buffet), meaning meals take longer and there are few reasons to get up from the table or disrupt the conversation. In the regular course of the

program students generally recognize supper as a time when they meet new people because they are actively encouraged not to sit at the same table each evening.

To recruit students I announced at expedition briefings and to specific student groups that I was looking for participants and asked volunteers to approach me. I invited Visiting youth to participate alongside Northern youth, so as not to be exclusive, and to try and provide for the exchange of perspectives between them. On several occasions small group interviews were coincidentally held with one Northern youth, one southern Canadian youth and one American youth, because that was the combination of participants that expressed interest that day. Those who participated often had not talked with each other much before their participation in the research, and some had not even met. Participants included: 9 Northern youth (all female) and 13 visiting youth (6 female, 7 male) consisting of 6 Canadians, 6 Americans and 1 International student. 3 students were 20 years or older, 14 students were aged 17-19, and 5 students 16 or under.

To help students remember the events of the expedition I used a map of our itinerary and a diagram of the ship as prompts. I began the interviews by reviewing where we had been and inviting students to identify their most positive moments, and then their most challenging moments, by placing a sticker on the map or ship diagram corresponding to their experience. The stickers were very well liked and students often wanted to place multiple stickers and tell multiple stories. Students were generous and thoughtful in taking turns, listening closely to one another, acknowledging each other's responses and also finding unique things to share from their own perspective. For the most part conversation flowed easily, students spoke freely and seemed to enjoy being given the attention and opportunity to share their feelings and reflections.

Facing the Past: Forced relocation, suicide, and getting to hope

Hebron was not originally on the SOI expedition itinerary for 2016. Due to unusual ice conditions that summer we were pushed farther south than planned, and we targeted Hebron only days before arriving. Canada's national Inuit representative organization, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), coincidentally planned to launch the *National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy* (2016) at Hebron that same week and invited us to attend the event. Natan Obed, President of ITK, is descended from a family that formerly lived at Hebron. He chose it as the site to launch the suicide prevention strategy in honour of the deep anguish felt by the people of Nunatsiavut, and the ongoing struggle with suicide in that region, where rates are highest among the Inuit homelands.

Unfortunately, due to foggy conditions Natan Obed and other dignitaries who intended to launch the strategy could not arrive by plane. Having arrived at Hebron by ship, SOI decided, with Obed's encouragement, to hold its own impromptu ceremony to recognize suicide as a legacy of the site's colonial history. We filed into the partially refurbished church and sat, as Moravians traditionally did, with men on the right side and women on the left side. We filled the space, every bench seat taken, and with many students sitting on the floor and staff standing around the perimeter.

During the ceremony that unfolded, Inuit youth representatives read aloud the provincial government apology for the relocation, and the official Inuit response to the apology. An address from Natan Obed about the importance of suicide prevention was given in his absence. A moment of silence for victims of suicide was held. Many tears were shed as participants thought of people they had lost or who had struggled from other effects of historical trauma. Inuit Elders sang and played instruments. SOI's staff musicians performed. An Elder drum danced along with an Inuk student, and several young women performed Inuit

throatsinging. A youth from Labrador performed the Nunatsiavut anthem. We were told that throatsinging and drumdancing would never have been allowed in church in the past, but on this day we overturned that restriction and became part of reclaiming Inuit tradition, perhaps renewing the sacredness of the space. Students were given time after the ceremony to tour the abandoned buildings, the monument and the nearby cemeteries. They also connected with the Inuit families who were caring for Hebron over the summer. One of the caretakers, descended from a family who had lived there, said the ceremony we assembled was the happiest thing that had ever happened in the church.

The day was about recognizing the historical injustices that occurred at Hebron specifically, as well as the contemporary struggle with suicide among Inuit across Canada. It was intended to celebrate Inuit culture and language rather than allowing it to be suppressed, as it was during colonization. The day inspired hope for the future as participating youth mobilized around the idea that Inuit communities *can* rise out of the intergenerational trauma of their ancestors.

Learning in the experiential encounter: Youth voices on visiting Hebron

As noted earlier, part of my research methods involved asking SOI youth participants—those who volunteered to join small group interviews—what event during the entire expedition had been most challenging for them. Many, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, mentioned the visit to Hebron. Here are three examples of what they said:

A 17-year-old Inuk from Nunavut said the following of her experience:

[A] hard thing was when they were speaking of how we [Inuit] know how to heal, but for me I don't really see it. For me being here [in Labrador] that's one step closer, helping our parents and grandparents heal. My granny and my mom went to residential school. My great-granny—they were relocated to [Nunavut community]. I try to help them move on but when we try, they just get mad at us. Hard for me to understand why. My generation is having to hold all of it on our shoulders, we want to move on but we're trying to help our parents to heal. Sometimes their judgment comes onto us and we go into a small shell.

A 23-year-old international student explained that there is more than one Hebron in the world.

Hebron really hit home for me. [...] In Palestine, we have a Hebron. I was there and things aren't going well. It used to be my favourite city and now it is desolate, a completely different city. Hearing the stories here brought back those feelings. People have similar kinds of attachment or detachment from a place. I cried in the church, and when we got back, and that night. But by the end of it, I was supported and felt so good to be part of their celebration and apology.

A 16-year-old non-Indigenous participant from Atlantic Canada shared connections he made.

[The] Most special and significant [moment] was at Hebron; there was a lot of reconciliation and truth. In New Brunswick there is no longer very many Aboriginal students and Elders where I'm from. There were Maliseet, Mi'kmaq and Métis. Having that emotional connection with Inuit students was very special because I couldn't experience it where I'm from. [The] theme of suicide and how it affects Aboriginal students [is] close to me because my closest friend's brother committed suicide and my friend found him. It was very emotional for the entire community.

Further, he added, "I didn't [choose Hebron as the most challenging moment] because I don't think it was a challenge for me to feel the way I did that day, I felt I could experience everything that I was feeling very openly and everybody surrounding me was having many of the same feelings."

In these student reflections I see expression of the difficult feelings that bubble up in encounters with historical trauma caused by colonization. However, the students are not simply voyeurs or those learning *about* Indigenous people and their separate realities. In these three quotations I see students from different backgrounds coming to think and feel *alongside*

the people directly affected by Hebron. In each case they draw connections to their own context of colonialism, and the challenge of healing from it. The student from Nunavut speaks of the parallel impacts of residential schools and Inuit relocations on her family, and the parallel challenges with intergenerational healing. The student from Palestine speaks of displacement and decay, where once there was a vibrant community. The student from Atlantic Canada is concerned about the absence of Indigenous people, as they have been pushed off their traditional territories, therefore he feels a lack of connection. And yet, he shows commonality in the grief associated with suicide. Each acknowledges the experience of Hebron as a healing one, saying it was “one step closer” to healing, noting “I was supported,” or concluding “I could experience what I was feeling openly and we shared it.”

During another research interview I spoke to an SOI staff member who is a mental health counselor, born and raised in the North, and someone who was keenly tuned into the students’ experiences of Hebron. I asked her why she thought it was such a provocative experience. She said:

In years past [during SOI expeditions] suicide has been touched upon, like the statistics when someone was giving a presentation. But with Hebron it was more experiential. You got to go to this place, you got to see with your own eyes, touch with your own hands, and smell with your own nose. You got to experience this place, and there was a sense of reality. Statistics are statistics... but what does that mean? What I loved about Hebron was, yes, it was ‘these are statistics, etc. etc.,’ but then ‘these are the strengths.’ It was that beautiful movement of ‘This is what has happened, this is how Inuit have been affected, this was where we are and where we’re going.’ I think that letter of forgiveness by the people of Labrador was pretty impactful.

This quotation clearly evokes the powerful nature of experiential learning, of visiting real places. Any history teacher comparing what they usually do in four-walled classrooms to establish a connection to the past would undoubtedly point out the uniqueness of a pedagogical encounter such as the one I have described. That is certainly true, it was just about as emergent, sensory and immersive as learning ever gets. It was incredibly unique.

But, what might have been as important as *being there* in the place where colonial confrontation happened, were the relationships established between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous visitors to the place. We arrived, witnessed, felt, and left together.

Decolonizing through recognition of difference *and* connection in educational experiences

As outlined in the Introduction, Donald’s (2012) theory of decolonizing education involves inviting Canadians to “face each other across deeply learned divides, revisit and deconstruct their shared past, and engage carefully with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together” (p. 102). He asks to consider that, “perspectives on history, memory and experience are connected and interreferential” (p. 102). Moves toward ethical relationality demand that we carefully attend to “the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a person or community understands and interprets the world” (p. 104).

I saw something like this relationality built during our visit to Hebron. There were more than a few token Indigenous representatives on this journey, more than a guest speaker or one tour guide at the site. A third of our youth group and many adults were Northern, Indigenous people whose lives continue to be affected by historical trauma made real by the place called Hebron. The community that was built among the Northern youth, and with the students who were seeing the North for the first time, produced a sense of difference. But, at the same time, it produced a strong bond and a sense of the importance of equity in the present and future so as to recover, and so as not to perpetuate injustice.

You can hear this acknowledgement of both difference and connection in another quote from the aforementioned 16-year-old youth from Atlantic Canada, when I asked him what he'd learned about the Arctic:

Having the realization that the way that I'm experiencing the Arctic in the typical Western British-descendent way—Like, “Whoa, it's a great vast expanse of mystery and adventure, and craziness, and we don't know anything about it, it's all brand new to me.” The realization that that is so much different from how the Inuit students treat it—as more of a homeland, and everything here has cultural meaning to them. It doesn't have the same meaning for me as somebody who didn't grow up living in it. I hadn't expected that disconnect. Making that realization that it is so much more intertwined with their culture than it is with typical white, British, Western mindset. It was pretty crazy.

This student clearly “attends to the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a person or community understands and interprets the world,” (2012, p. 104) as Donald suggests is needed. This exemplar reinforces the idea that if decolonizing education is the process of deconstructing taken-for-granted notions of the past and present, and reconstructing them with more fulsome attention to Indigenous-non-Indigenous relationality, then decolonizing and historical consciousness are deeply linked.

Decolonizing historical consciousness

To my understanding, which I have detailed in greater depth elsewhere (McGregor, 2015), historical consciousness is thinking with the awareness that both *what* we think about, and our own *way* of thinking, are historically conditioned. In the Gadamerian sense of historically “effected” consciousness, processes of knowing are never objective (Gadamer, 1975/2013). Rather, experiences, and the forces that shape our experiences such as place, time, identity, and relationships, always shape processes of knowing. If we accept this premise, then we also accept that knowledge can, and must, be remade as experience shifts—in response to place, time, identity and relationships. The openness to such shifts in knowing, and to shifts in ourselves as a result, is the same openness warranted in advancing decolonizing. What we “know” about Canada and its history, what we “know” about Indigenous people, should never be static, never fixed, never secure in a single narrative or a single experience. We must recognize the extent to which our perspectives on Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations are historically conditioned.

The question then emerges, how do educators help youth become aware of how their consciousness is historically conditioned, and will this contribute to their ability to participate in decolonizing Canada? Confrontations with coloniality, in the presence of others who see places in the same moment, and yet know them differently, help to make this real in the learning experiences of youth. In my view, educators are called to invite youth to become aware, and then remember, that everyone's view of the world is historically conditioned—particularly by identities, places and relationships. How teachers go about this in decolonizing teaching and nurturing historical consciousness will likewise depend on their identity, place and relationships. And yet, perhaps there are some dimensions of pedagogy that hold particularly valuable potential.

The first significant dimension is an embodied encounter with a real place that strongly elicits the history of colonization in Canada. Second, the place likely would not have held such potential in the absence of group of individuals still affected by that very history, those who show that the past comes with us into the present. Third, the focus of our visit was the suicide epidemic in Inuit communities and the extent to which this challenge flows from intergenerational trauma linked to relocations such as the one from Hebron. Fourth, the context of being on an expedition offered space, time and relationships within which the

encounter percolated, or set in, especially through dialogue among peers. The journey allowed the youth and adults who had all been there, a new community of learners, to reflect on and discuss the meaning of the encounter in the days and weeks afterward. This reflection was demonstrated through, but certainly not limited to, the students' participation in my research.

This pedagogical experience involved moving together through time and space, and changing conditions. The conditions we encountered were familiar for some participants (the Northern youth) and very foreign to others (the Visiting youth). Processes of forming community, made up of many new, networked bonds, framed our journey. We literally came to see the world anew, but not all in the same way. Students seemed to recognize that we came with our own lenses, but nevertheless could learn and grow side-by-side. I suggest that these conditions of the encounter helped to mirror, and nurture, learning that serves purposes associated with historical consciousness and decolonizing. The illumination of historical conditions, of difference and of connection, also may help overcome the perceived separateness of Northerners and other citizens of Canada and the world.

Confronting realities associated with histories of colonization can bring out emotion, and for us at Hebron, it certainly did. But without the chance to acknowledge these truths that surround us, we cannot work towards the healing that is needed within us and between us. As demonstrated by student remarks, the holistic, experiential learning journey to Hebron touched many individuals deeply. While the emergent pedagogical encounter will never be repeated exactly, I hope it stands to show that educators can continue to seek and facilitate learning experiences associated with difficult histories and contemporary challenges, and mobilize Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth to stand along side each other in understanding, respect, solidarity and resilience.

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About the Author

Heather E. McGregor is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Ottawa. She is the author of *Inuit Education and Schools in the Eastern Arctic* (2010) and has published articles in the areas of history of Inuit education, curriculum change, decolonizing research methodologies, and historical thinking in relation to Indigenous perspectives.

¹ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2008-2015) resulted from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, and was part of a comprehensive response to the harmful legacy of Indian Residential School system. Their final report identified 94 “Calls to Action,” primarily on the part of government agencies across the country in fields such as child welfare, education, health care and justice. The final report can be found at: <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890>

² In his 2009 article, Donald goes on to describe a “curriculum sensibility” called Indigenous métissage, which endeavours to provide the place-based, ecological, relational approach to learning that better serves decolonizing goals. For the purposes of this article, recognizing the emergent nature of the encounter, I have maintained focus on his explanation of the conditions that warrant such an approach rather than application of métissage itself.