TEACHING THE NORTH: THE CURIOUS BUSINESS OF BEING INSIDE-OUT

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ABSTRACT

Today's North—the international Arctic—needs citizens with a broad grasp of the circumpolar picture, who understand its common problems and who share a basic orientation and vocabulary. The capable northern citizen is emerging from the region itself, from northern institutions that are self-consciously nurturing and educating their region's peoples for a life lived with choice and by choice in the region. Where northern institutions might have begun by external fiat as deliberate agents of development, northern institutions today have achieved a kind of devolution of their institutional world view and are more and more able to take their own region's pulse and respond to their own region's needs. Teaching Northern Studies may be a curious business. Northern Studies at Yukon College today are about us, but it's an "us" that lives in a wider region. My Northern Studies today are circumpolar, multinational, multilingual, multiethnic, and multidisciplinary. So are my students and so are their questions. My Northern Studies are Circumpolar Studies.

Some northerners like to think of themselves as being tucked away in the North, "inside" as it is, or at least separate and separated from the world "Outside." They are in "the North," a fuzzy sort of space that is as much an imaginary construct as it is a geographical region. It is, nevertheless, a real place and the people who inhabit it are "northerners." If it is hard to say what is North, northern, or "inside", it is very easy to identify what is Outside. It lies beyond the zone of sporadic lodges on the north-flowing highways. Everything briefcase-toting, 24-hour, dress-code abiding and poncy is Outside.

That region-centric attitude has faded somewhat now, and the Internet probably had something to do with it. My sense, too, is that land claims implementation has contributed. As the North gained effective self-determination, there was less to fear from the experts with the briefcases and the PowerPoints. Increasingly, they are us. There are, of course, remaining pockets of that Inside/Outside thinking and the word is easy shorthand: "Did you go Out this summer?" "I was Out on medical." Times, however, have changed and the North isn't just "the North" anymore. Increasingly, it's "the Arctic." It's not just our North anymore. Increasingly, it's the world's "Circumpolar North." We've been supersized. The North-here is now also the North-there and Outside isn't something we can hope to ignore.

Today's North—the international Arctic—needs citizens with a broad grasp of the circumpolar picture, who understand its common problems and who share a basic orientation and vocabulary. In the old days this was generally understood as having the capacity to participate in northern development—by which it was usually meant that there would be northerners who could be hired to drive the trucks. These days the idea of who and what we need to participate in "sustainable development" is so much broader, so much more diverse. The capable northern citizen is emerging from the region itself, from northern institutions that are self-consciously nurturing and educating their region's peoples for a life lived with choice and by choice in the region. Where northern institutions might have begun by external fiat as deliberate agents of development (see Graham, 1997), northern institutions today have achieved a kind of devolution of their institutional world view and are more and more able to take their own region's pulse and respond to their own region's needs.

From its inception, the Northern Studies program at Yukon College has aimed to be relevant and useful, not just to the students in the courses it teaches but to the wider community through its graduates. When it actually opened its doors to students, though, it was a modest affair but one committed to form competent graduates. As events unfolded in the Arctic, the Northern Studies program adjusted and broadened its scope and content. In the paragraphs that follow, I would like to talk about Northern Studies at Yukon College and with the University of the Arctic, and about how we came to be inside out and are, thereby, contributing to a new New North.

NORTHERN STUDIES, OR WHAT TO MAKE OF THE NORTH

When the Yukon College Ayamdigut Campus opened in Whitehorse in 1988, it was momentous. Vision had met a construction crew on the road and put together a building that sat on the top of a hill, looked competent and luxuriated in room to grow. The parking lots optimistically expected hundreds of cars and classrooms expected 20s and 30s of students. In 1994, the late Aron Senkpiel, founding dean of the Yukon College University Transfer Division (later Arts and Science) wrote an account of the first thirty years of post-secondary education in the Yukon for a special issue of *The Northern Review* on northern education. He marked 1963 as the year post-secondary education stated to take form, the year the Whitehorse Vocational Training School opened. It was astonishing, he mused, how quickly it had all developed. By 1983, the vocational school and a University of British Columbia teacher training program had been merged to create Yukon College.

In 1986, a consultant hired to develop a plan for education in the territory recommended that the government give Yukoners greater "options to stay" home for post-secondary education and training (Orlikow, 1986). The government did so by supporting the further development of Yukon College and its community campuses as a community college. In 1988, Yukon College in Whitehorse was set up in brand new and fabulous premises, and it was expected that its academic programs would be just as new and fabulous.

With the UBC program transferred to the college, the Arts and Science Division had "become the North's first autonomous university-level academic program" (Senkpiel, 1994, p. 101). The division's faculty proposed a brand-new suite of integrated diploma programs in Native Studies, Northern Science, and Northern Outdoor and Environmental Studies, collectively referred to as Northern Studies[1]. It would be, the "first comprehensive, university-level northern studies program in Canada." Crucially, it would "allow Northerners to do what people from other regions of the country could do: learn about their region while living in it" (Senkpiel, 1994, pp. 101-102).

The project was accepted and the College got funding and government support. The new college building was officially opened on 1 October 1988 and the Government gave the college a $1 million gift to seed a permanent Northern Studies Research Fund. Tagish Elder Angela Sidney bestowed the campus name, Ayamdigut, a Tagish name meaning "she got up and went." That fall, the first Northern Studies (NOST) students were taking general courses in Arts and Science. They would take their first Northern Studies courses in the 1989 Fall semester and the first graduates would be expected in 1990.

People had been studying the North for generations and had been more or less officially calling it "Northern Studies" for a decade or so. A distinction, however, should be drawn between studying the North in piecemeal fashion and doing Northern Studies as an integrated, multidisciplinary field. There was little precedent for the

latter. In 1994, the novelty of the field led historian Kenneth Coates to critique its limited explanatory framework. The North, he wrote, was "very much a conceptual wasteland." Northern scholarship was being done, to its detriment, from "within the conceptual frameworks and intellectual paradigms of the Southern, or 'outside,' world" (Coates, 1994, p. 15). The questions and the interpretations had to come from within to give the findings necessary relevance.[2] That's what we were doing and we seemed to be on the right track.

In building its new Northern Studies diplomas, the Arts and Science faculty, led by Aron Senkpiel, had to balance two opposing needs. The first was a need for good, solid, disciplinary courses, in fields such as Anthropology, History, Geography or Biology. In this regard, novelty was not an asset. The second was the need for genuine multi-disciplinarity. Courses in Northern Studies had to embrace multiple disciplinary lenses in order for the region, its lands and its peoples to be understood in all their wonderful complexity.

Courses were commissioned to fill the first need. To address that second need, multidisciplinary courses were developed in-house, with advice from content experts. The program proposal envisaged a two-year, 66-credit program, with four core courses (Technical Writing, Statistics, Research in the North, and Natural History of the North (for social sciences students) or Social History of the North (for natural science students)). Northern Studies and Liberal Arts courses filled the remaining 54 credits. The first disciplinary Northern Studies courses were in History, Geography, Political Science, Anthropology and Economics: History of the Canadian North, Circumpolar Geography, Constitutional Development of the North, Subarctic Ethnology, Subarctic Archaeology, Oral Traditions and Mythology, Regional Economies of the North. For the most part, the "North" of the title referred to the Canadian North.

Being multidisciplinary was particularly tricky, since it was not often taught at universities. As a proxy for teaching students to be capable of multidisciplinary thinking, the NOST programs aimed to have graduates become multi-disciplined by layering disciplinary knowledge on the multidisciplinary core. While the instructors of the courses were disciplinary experts, the students, through the experience of taking the intensive program, would emerge with a more multidisciplinary perspective on issues than their teachers. The graduates of the program would be the first of a new kind of northerner, one who appreciated the complexity of northern issues and society and who had the ability to understand and speak the languages of a good cross-section of the North's experts, from First Nations leaders[3] to social and natural scientists who might have roles to play in the public sphere. The NOST graduate was an informed northerner.

THE PROBLEM WITH INFORMATION

In the first years of the Yukon College NOST program, it was a challenge to teach the North and particularly the North beyond Canadian borders. The biggest problem was a lack of good-quality and recent information. The Yukon College library had only limited holdings in the field, though it was actively developing its collection. Parks Canada had a library in town and the Yukon Archives was collecting Yukon material. Collections had been made sporadically, so the coverage was often spotty. To be sure, there were relevant journals: for example, Arctic, published by the Arctic Institute of North America ("unique multidisciplinary vehicle for a wide range of northern topics" (Harrison and Hodgson, 1987)), Arctic Anthropology from University of Wisconsin, Musk-Ox from University of Saskatchewan, and Polar Record, from Scott Polar Research Institute at Cambridge University. Others, like Fram and Acta Borealia were less well known and hard to access. Academic journals had uneven coverage of relevant topics. The reality was that information, like pretty much everything else, had to come up the highway or by air and then, as now, budgets were tight. In addition, the Cold War kept a great deal of Soviet information out of the public sphere entirely and language made other material inaccessible. Faculty and students often had difficulty getting reliable information about any given topic.

Part of the solution was to create and publish our own scholarship. It was clear to two of the Northern Studies faculty members (N. Alexander Easton and Aron Senkpiel) that there was a niche for another northern journal. In their inaugural editorial article, "New Bearings on Northern Scholarship," Senkpiel and Easton (1988) explained why they felt it was the right moment to launch a new journal. They were enthused by the expansion of research North of 60 since the 1970s in Canada occasioned by the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, the Alaska Highway pipeline, devolution, land claims negotiations, and were delighted by the creation of the two northern colleges

that they thought would serve as centres of production, consumption and distribution of northern knowledge. *The Northern Review* was conceived as a vehicle "to elucidate, as broadly as possible, human thought about and action in the North" (Senkpiel and Easton, 1988, p. 14). They wanted the journal to be a place where northern residents could engage in "the critical discussion of such issues as northern economic development" (Senkpiel and Easton, 1988, p. 15). The North they meant was "Alaska, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and the northern extremities of the provinces." Their North, in 1988, was North American.

The founding editors had four reasons for *The Northern Review*. First, the journals already out there were publishing a fraction of the submissions they received, which reduced the chance that work by long-time Northerners would be published, especially if they lacked formal institutional affiliation. Second, none of the extant journals focused on "looking broadly at human thought about and activity in the North" (p. 22). Third, there was no scholarly journal being published in the territories and none "whose stated purpose is to develop what we call 'indigenous northern scholarship'" (Senkpiel and Easton, 1988, p. 22). The last reason they gave for starting the journal was the enormous distance between the northern scholarly community (the southern academics) and its "subject of study", that had led them to be "relatively ineffectual in developing the scholarly potential of northerners" (Senkpiel and Easton, 1988, p. 23).

The journal launched with a print run of 500; a "fragile beginning" according to the editors, "of a new expedition of sorts, an attempt to map the bewildering topography of this place here" (Senkpiel and Easton, 1988, p. 25). The *Northern Review* had its ups and downs, but has successfully overcome all challenges and will be publishing its 36th issue in December 2013. Its scope has broadened to include the circumpolar North; it is not limited to the North of North America as it has been in its beginning. It has become available online, has been open access for a year or more and has, over the years, dipped its toes into a broad range of disciplines. It is no longer the only journal of human-oriented northern studies, though it is, I believe, still the only one published north of 60 in Canada.

The information landscape now is very different. It would be the work of many pages to mention the sources and collaborations that have contributed so much to the discourse and the discovery of the circumpolar world in the past twenty years. I would be remiss, however, if I were to fail to mention the Fourth International Polar Year (IPY IV) in 2007-2008 and the ongoing work of newly developed international forums, national polar agencies, regional research bodies, Indigenous organizations, national and international NGOs, etc. The data and knowledge they have generated are an exciting resource for researchers of and in the North. This happy state of affairs has developed from those important international Arctic events I've mentioned here, but most notably, perhaps, through the creation of the Arctic Council and one of its projects, the University of the Arctic.

THE UARCTIC 'R US

The idea of a University of the Arctic surfaced soon after the Arctic Council was established in 1996. After Canada and Sweden had submitted a proposal for "International Education and Training in the Arctic: A University of the Arctic," the Circumpolar Universities Association (CUA) was commissioned to explore the "concept of a circumpolar university" (Johnson, 1999, p. iii). The report (Heal, Langlais, and Snellman, 1997) imagined a University of the Arctic as "a higher education institution, focused on the environmental, cultural and economic integrity of Arctic regions" (p. 1). The university, through circumpolar cooperation, would "address the fundamental understanding of sustainable development" (p. 1). That report was accepted and the CUA was asked to form a working group to undertake a feasibility study. The report, "With Shared Voices," was presented to the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in 1998.

The undergraduate Circumpolar Studies program would be the UArctic "flagship or signature program" (Poelzer, 2007, p. 31). This was significant because the more usual model is for specialist study to be reserved for the graduate level. As one example, in 1977, the Science Council of Canada recommended creating an "unorthodox" northern university that would consist of a graduate school and an extensions department "to provide a focus for the development of northern research activity explicitly designed to solve northern problems"

(p. 56). The suggestion of a graduate-level focus to start struck a nerve. The need in the Canadian North was for undergraduate teaching that would help build resident academic expertise. The broader aim for the UArctic was for citizens who were aware of being residents of the circumpolar North.

The educational program of the UArctic was, therefore, of particular importance to Yukon College. Aron Senkpiel had been championing a vision of accessible university options for Yukon and northern residents since he'd arrived in the Yukon in 1980 (see Graham, 2007). He was a tireless advocate for expanding the North's capacity to teach, learn, and enquire. "In the North, for the North and by the North," he'd say. That's what was important. The University of the Arctic offered the possibility of the leading northern institutions world-wide sharing their expertise and curriculum with Yukon College and its students. The UArctic was, and arguably continues to be, "one of the most ambitious attempts to address [the] challenge of creating access to university education in remote, northern communities" (Poelzer, 2007, p. 28). By being a member of this group, the hope was that Yukon College students, wherever they were, would be able to take courses online from any other UArctic-member institution. UArctic membership would require that courses shared would be treated as domestic for any degree residency requirements. That was the plan, and it is coming in spite of the fact that it has taken a long time to operationalize and we're not quite there. Four or five member institutions have offered a course online to UArctic-member students. We can hope for more in the future.

The Circumpolar Studies Program of the UArctic continues to be of great importance to Yukon College and its Northern Studies programs. The seven-course core is shared curriculum that any student may take, in their home institutions or in international online sections. The curriculum of the seven courses is supported by materials published by organizations like the Arctic Council Working Groups, and, more and more, by programs of the University of the Arctic (*e.g.*, Northern Research Forum) and related projects (Arctic Year Book, for example). Moreover, those UArctic programs are the points of engagement for the member institutions and the 130-odd members can each pick the ones that are most useful to them. Yukon College, for example, is a founding member of the UArctic, is involved with the north2north Student Mobility program and contributes teaching to the Circumpolar Studies Program.

Northern studies has benefitted enormously from nearly two decades of data, information and critical study of the North, from the North, for the North and for the world. We're awash in information and daily we have new ways to find it, access it, share it and teach it. Residents of the region now have more opportunities to connect than were dreamt of twenty or so years ago. The Internet has made communication and information dissemination easier, and the proliferation of organizations offers unprecedented opportunities for networking and best-practices-sharing. Circumpolar cooperation is national and international but it is also personal and interpersonal.

THE CURIOUS BUSINESS: CONCLUSION

Teaching Northern Studies has been something of a curious business. I wonder whether it is, in fact, possible to teach Northern Studies. Perhaps what I am really doing is creating space for students to "multidiscipline" themselves. I can imagine my Northern Studies experience as a journey from a narrow mountain valley to a broad plain. I have no way of knowing, of course, if my experiences resonate with anyone else. I do think, though, that there has been an evolution in what we mean when we say Northern Studies.

In 1988, Northern Studies was local and national, rarely international. It was, however, an opportunity to study the North as if it mattered, a homeland, as Thomas Berger termed it, and not as a frontier. It was exciting to put the periphery at the centre in our classrooms. We spent time drawing the boundaries of the North. Then we looked for new ways to explain our findings and experiences. We were able to do that in part because the Cold War ended and the Internet began and information flowed more freely. Eight Arctic nations agreed to talk about common issues and Indigenous people were invited to participate. We got into the practice of coordinating Arctic science and we had a circumpolar network of universities and other to contribute to the work, talk about it, disseminate it and teach it.

Teaching Northern Studies is, indeed, a curious business, one I would not trade for anything. Northern Studies at Yukon College today are still about us, but it's an "us" that lives in a wider region. The fences are down and the posts have been moved out a great distance. My Northern Studies today is circumpolar, multinational, multilingual, multiethnic, and multidisciplinary. So are my students and so are their questions. My Northern Studies are Circumpolar Studies. My homeland has become more inclusive. My world has become more diverse. My work has become more challenging. And my students will become more. Just more.

NOTES

[1] A program in Northern Justice and Criminology would be added later.

[2] This is a discussion that continues today: the parties are Indigenous peoples and academic researchers but the conversation is familiar.

[3] However, the first graduates emerged before the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement was signed and the "First Four" First Nations governments were created

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