

# Chapter 16

## Southern Reflections on Education Toward a Sustainable North



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**Abstract** To those of us closer to the Antarctic region of the world, the concept of the Circumpolar North is quite intriguing. The chapters in this book provide some insights into the lived experiences of people across the Circumpolar North, with a specific focus on educational equity and inclusion. In their descriptions of what it is like to live, work, and be in this place within the Circumpolar North, the authors explore learning, teaching, educational provision, and connections between culture, identity, and language. The chapters provide points of connection, enabling readers to highlight both the similarities and differences between their own contexts and those described. One of the great values in promoting such connections lies in the generation of opportunities for reflexivity, as we each consider our own context, question what we take for granted, and why that might be so. At the same time as recognising the uniqueness of the region, the chapters in this book draw us away from romanticised tourist images of the Circumpolar North that focus on snow-covered wonderlands, pristine landscapes, and thriving Indigenous communities living in harmony with nature. While acknowledging the challenges associated with remoteness, they also steer us away from stereotypes of disadvantage that automatically equate remoteness with deficit. Rather, the chapters describe contexts across the Circumpolar North that are both similar and different – from each other as well as from those of readers living and working outside the region. The rich culture and history of each context is noted, providing a base for addressing the complex challenges associated with promoting educational equity and inclusion.

**Keywords** Circumpolar north · Equity · Inclusion · Colonisation · Indigenous languages

## 16.1 Introduction

This book has been generated through the project entitled *Enhancing Equity in Education in the Circumpolar North*, supported by the *University of the Arctic Thematic Network: Teacher Education for Diversity and Social Justice*. It draws together authors from many locations within the Circumpolar North, sharing perspectives from Norway, Finland, Scotland, Canada, USA, Iceland, Sweden, Faroe Islands, Russia, and Greenland and reflects the aims of the network which include a focus on education for equity and social justice, cooperation among members, and the exchange of ideas and information.

To those of us closer to the Antarctic region of the world, the concept of the Circumpolar North which encompasses

the area traditionally covered by the terms ‘Arctic’ and ‘Subarctic’, the northern lands of the world’s eight most northernmost countries (the Arctic Eight): Canada, Finland, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States (Alaska)” (UArctic, 2021)

is quite intriguing. The term Antarctic, drawn from Greek and literally meaning the opposite to the north (Arctic), (Hince, 2000), directs us to the differences between

the regions. For example, compared with the Arctic and Subarctic regions, the Antarctic and Subantarctic tend to be characterised by far flung island groups, and, with a few exceptions, human inhabitation tends to be restricted to those attached to research and conservation sites. While both the northern and southern regions include remote, inhospitable, and uninhabitable environments, the southern areas (generally), do not support permanent populations and the associated community contexts that sustain these. Hence, part of the intrigue for southerners such as us relates to the ways in which communities in the Circumpolar North have developed and been maintained over time, as well as efforts to sustain these into the future. Educational provision and strategies to promote equity and inclusion are key elements of these efforts.

While much of the Circumpolar North region is unfamiliar and intriguing, several of the concepts explored in these chapters have some similarities with experiences in other parts of the world. These include experiences of remoteness, colonisation, the loss of Indigenous languages as well as efforts to revitalise these, and important connections between identity, language, and culture. Hence, the issues and approaches described in the chapters of this book present possibilities for reflection and action from educators across many parts of the world.

The chapters in this book provide some insights into the lived experiences of people across the Circumpolar North, with a specific focus on educational equity and inclusion. In their descriptions of what it is like to live, work, and *be* in *this* place within the Circumpolar North, the authors explore learning, teaching, educational provision, and connections between culture, identity, and language. The chapters provide points of connection, enabling readers to highlight both the similarities and differences between their own contexts and those described. One of the great values in promoting such connections lies in the generation of opportunities for reflexivity, as we each consider our own context, question what we take for granted, and why that might be so.

At the same time as recognising the uniqueness of the region, the chapters in this book draw us away from romanticised tourist images of the Circumpolar North that focus on snow-covered wonderlands, pristine landscapes, and thriving Indigenous communities living in harmony with nature (Joona, 2018; Müller et al., 2020). While acknowledging the challenges associated with remoteness, they also steer us away from stereotypes of disadvantage that automatically equate remoteness with deficit. Rather, the chapters describe contexts across the Circumpolar North that are both similar and different – from each other as well as from those of readers living and working outside the region. The rich culture and history of each context is noted, providing a base for addressing the complex challenges associated with promoting educational equity and inclusion.

## 16.2 In this Place

In describing the experiences of those living and working in the Circumpolar North, the chapters reiterate the importance of social contexts and relationships and the impact these have not only on the experiences of the individual, but on the broader

social fabric. These descriptions are a reminder that place is more than a geographical classification, and that living *in this place* is much more complex than imagined or stereotypical narratives of the Circumpolar North might suggest.

Several theoretical conceptualisations have emphasised the relational nature of space and place: Lefebvre (1991) argued for conceptualising space as a social entity, with each society producing social space; Massey (1994) described places as relational, consisting of networks of social relations; and Soja (1989) outlined the concept of third space – lived space – which transcended the binaries of measurable and mappable space (first space) and subjective space (second space). In these conceptualisations, space is created and re-created through social interaction and relationships. As such, what it means to be *in this place* is constantly under construction. From this, we can draw comparisons about different places, noting their similarities and differences, but also must acknowledge that each place “is differently ‘practised’ into complete realisation through integration of its economy, geography, and demography realised as effects of its history and the overlay of governance and policy” (Reid, 2017, p. 94). In other words, despite some apparent similarities among educational communities in the Circumpolar North, it is important also to note their diversity and to recognise the complexity and multiplicity of experiences and the impact of these on efforts to promote educational equity and inclusion. Each of the chapters in this book recognises the multiplicity of lived experiences and the social interactions in specific contexts. They achieve this by positioning educational equity and inclusion as an interplay of events that encompass the elements identified by Reid (2017): economy, geography, demography, history, governance, and policy. The social contexts created by the interplay of these elements sets the scene for responsive and innovative curriculum, pedagogy, and practice.

Several chapter authors note the intertwined influence of geography, demography, and educational policy. In her description of a small rural community in Norway, Bjøru describes how policies to close small schools in remote locations have contributed to demographic changes, with the lack of a school making it difficult for communities to attract families to the area, resulting in other families leaving the area to move to larger population areas so that children can access education. In some northern areas of Finland, Joonas (2018) reports that “young families with many children start to be a rare sight. The population is getting older, and many want to move nearer to the cities and closer to services”. Lakkala, Turunen, Laitinen, Norvapalo, and Thessler report a similar pattern, as young people seeking access to vocational education are required to move to regional centres. Changing demographic patterns also impact local economies: the closure of a school often means that teachers leave the community, as do their families and others involved in educational provision and support. Decreasing populations often also present further economic challenges, including limited opportunities for employment, investment, and access to services (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2018a, b).

Two of the chapters exploring education in Greenland emphasise the role of geography in the recruitment of teachers. With many communities located in isolated

areas, attracting and retaining teachers with appropriate qualifications presents challenges (Demant-Poort and Andersen). While the historical link with Denmark has provided an avenue for recruiting teachers in Greenland, Brincker describes the motivation attracting some teachers to remote areas as neo-paternalism, where teachers from “the former colonial power, Denmark – take up positions in the former colony. They are attracted by adventure . . . and are apparently willing to self-sacrifice in pursuit of their endeavour ‘out in the wilderness’ of the former colony”.

Often those living in rural and remote locations have close connections with other residents. For some, knowing almost everyone in the community provides a sense of belonging and connection. This, as well as a close connection to their homeland and heritage, makes it attractive for many young people to stay in their local community. For others, the closeness of community can seem overwhelming. For still others seeking to enter the community, a sense of acceptance and belonging can take some time to develop. The contrasting movement – away from the community – involves considerable change as people balance connections in local contexts with knowledge that they must leave them to access a range of services, resources, and opportunities. As one example, Lakkala et al. outline some of the challenges managed by young people who access vocational education in regional areas, noting their move “from an environment where everybody knows one another to a much larger place where they comprise a small group, and their challenges during the transition may go unnoticed”.

Movement away from communities can have both long-term and short-term consequences. Some young people move away from their home communities to access education and then return. Others make the move permanent. One of the challenges of education in rural and remote setting is described by Bjøru as the tension between promoting education that enables children and young people to remain in their home community, while at the same time providing an education that has the potential to draw “the young away from rural areas. . . [and] the notion that rural youth should be allowed to have the same aspirations and be given the same opportunities as the young in urban areas”. Each outcome has implications for educational equity and inclusion: How can broad educational provision be maintained in small communities? How can connection to culture and community be maintained as young people move to larger areas to fulfil their aspirations?

These tensions are noted by Beaton, Keskitalo, and Helander in their discussion of endangered Sámi languages. They report that in Finland, Sámi education is connected with the Sámi Homeland Area, but that approximately 75% of Sámi students live outside this area, and only 5% of those living outside the Sámi Homeland Area study Sámi languages. Efforts to revitalise Sámi languages have sought to address historical policies of colonisation and assimilation, as well as current trends involving diaspora and urbanisation. These strategies include recognition of Sámi as Indigenous peoples and provision for Sámi to become a language of instruction in primary schools. However, Beaton et al. note continued challenges related to a lack of resources – both human and economic – within Sámi education.

Out-migration is not the only changing demographic feature for many communities in the Circumpolar North. One of the rationales for the importance of

educational equity and inclusion noted by Vijayarathan and Óskarsdóttir refers to changes in immigration. Describing both Iceland and the Faroe Islands as historically monocultural and homogeneous, the increasing numbers of immigrants from diverse contexts means that migrants now comprise a substantial proportion of the population of both countries. One of the consequences is that educational provision needs to work positively with this diversity. Principles of educational equity and inclusion are at the heart of approaches to achieve this. However, at the same time, commitment to these principles can generate tensions, with Vijayarathan and Óskarsdóttir noting that both Icelandic and Faroese communities “perceive their languages as being under threat of extinction, because of the vulnerability of being a small group of speakers with heavy influence of English (Iceland and The Faroe Islands) and Danish (The Faroe Islands)”.

Balancing demands to retain the cultural and language identity of the Faroe Islands with recognition of, and support for, the ethnic cultural identity and heritage languages of immigrant children as they are included in the Faroese education system is a challenge explored further by Vijayarathan, who notes the dominance of both Danish and English as well as other languages of immigrants which have much larger international participation than Faroese. The dominance of the English language is also reported by Beaton et al. as a threat to the re-emergence of Scottish Gaelic, with the more dominant language having “the potential to undermine students’ language development and socialisation in the minority language outside the formal classroom”.

In several contexts of the Circumpolar North, promoting educational equity and inclusion involves both supporting languages introduced through experiences such as immigration and engagement in the global economy, and efforts to revitalise languages suppressed through colonisation, diaspora, and urbanisation. For example, the dominance of Danish in both the Faroe Islands and Greenland is attributed to their time as colonies of Denmark. In a similar vein, a long history of demographic dislocation and colonisation have contributed to Sámi languages and Scottish Gaelic being considered endangered. Beaton et al. outline historical factors contributing to the potential loss of these languages, as well as policy efforts to revitalise these. They argue that effective revitalisation efforts rely on education and that, despite moves in positive directions, there remains much to be done to ensure the everyday use of these languages and to recognise that Sámi languages and Scottish Gaelic are “inextricably linked the culture of the community” and that “this culture must be acknowledged within educational provision” for such efforts to provide equitable and inclusive education.

Educational policy is a key driver in promoting educational equity and inclusion. Both national and international policy have impacted on actions in the Circumpolar North. For example, reference to inclusion began to appear in national educational policy documentation soon after the *Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 1994) as international organisations adopted related commitments which were then reflected in national and local policy documents. Initial references to inclusive education focused on supporting the inclusion of children with special

education needs. Building on the base provided by the Salamanca Declaration, the Education 2030 Framework for Action outlined through the Incheon Declaration (UNESCO, 2015) moved away from the specific focus on children with special education needs to consider ways in which education policy and practice concerned the inclusion of all children (Meijer & Watkins, 2016). The Incheon framework emphasised educational equity and inclusion as key elements in the provision of quality education, with Ainscow (2020, p. 8) reporting the emphasis on “the need to address all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation, and learning processes and outcomes. In this way, it is made clear that the international EFA agenda really has to be about ‘all’”.

The policy environments outlined across the chapters indicate national approaches to promote the inclusion of ‘all’. For example, Óskarsdóttir and Wozniczka refer to the initial mention of inclusion in Icelandic education policy in 1995, with current laws extending this to ensure that “all learners have the right to quality education in an inclusive school in their neighbourhoods”. However, several chapter authors question the efficacy and extent of national inclusive education policies. For example, Lennert explores the potential for educational policy in Greenland to support innovation but cautions that attention to global commitments without recognition of “country-specific contexts, needs, capacity building” has the potential to trap educational systems in cycles that generate low-level outcomes. She cites as examples that international policies requiring resources such as a steady pool of skilled labour and that do not recognise high staff turnover or the resultant loss of capacity, are doomed to fail within the context of education in Greenland.

Similarly, Vijayarathan questions whether education policies in the Faroe Islands fulfil the purpose of acknowledging the diverse “ethnic cultural identity and heritage language (first language/mother tongue) of immigrant children” while at the same time promoting “their inclusion through education towards integration”. This question emphasises connections between language and identity and the importance of opportunities for immigrant children to retain their home language and identity, while at the same time, being welcomed into Faroese society. Vijayarathan attributes the omission of concepts of equity and social justice, as well as references to multilingualism and multiculturalism, within Faroese education policy documents to tensions emerging from the perceived vulnerability of the Faroese language. While privileging Faroese is regarded as a measure to protect the language, ignoring the connection between language and identity for immigrant children has the potential to undermine recognition and respect and limit efforts to promote social cohesion and educational outcomes.

The link between language and identity is also accentuated by Flotskaya, Bulanova, and Ponomareva, who outline provisions in the language policy for the Nenets Autonomous District of northern Russia. Within this policy, the Nenets language is considered “part of the culture and traditional way of life of the Nenets people”. While the official language of instruction is Russian, kindergartens and schools in this district use the Nenets language. However, the authors also note the presence of contradictory policies that seek both to integrate populations and preserve ethnic identities.

Policy is closely connected with governance – the processes of decision-making that guide organisational priorities, policies, and programs (OECD, 2019), as well as the mechanisms for management, compliance, and accountability. Lennert argues that embedding systematic and relevant “evaluative thinking and capacity building” within Greenland’s education system is critical to building relevant policies and practices that are responsive to changing contexts. Responsiveness as an issue is also raised in other chapters in the light of changing demographic trends. As the populations of rural and remote communities decline, the impetus for centralised governance tends to increase. However, centralised – metrocentric – policies and governance may not recognise the significance of place or the ways in which place informs and shapes learning and teaching in rural and remote areas, facing a continued tension between “pedagogies of belonging and pedagogies of mobile aspirations” (Corbett, 2020, p. 279). Across the chapters, specific instances of this tension are described by Bjørn in Norway and Lakkala et al. in Finland. The impact of metrocentric policies and practices is not only to be found for those accessing education, but also for those providing it, with Brincker describing differences between teacher recruitment and retention in Nuuk, the main centre of Greenland, and Tasiilaq, a community described as being on the periphery.

### **16.3 Spaces for Embedding and Enacting Educational Equity and Inclusion**

Across the chapters, educational equity and inclusion is situated within spaces created through the interplay of the elements identified by Reid (2017): economy, geography, demography, history, governance, and policy. These elements combine and interact to construct and re-construct places, constituted by networks of social relations (Massey, 1994). It is in these spaces that curriculum, pedagogy, and practice have the potential to embed and enact equity and inclusion. Several approaches working towards achieving this potential are identified through the chapters: multi-grade teaching; using heritage languages in everyday interactions; engaging with multiliteracies; examining colonising legacies; and listening to students’ perspectives. Many of these elements come together in approaches situated under the umbrella of culturally responsive pedagogies. As well, the critical roles of initial teacher education programs and professional learning in both supporting and challenging teachers and their practices are highlighted.

Culturally responsive pedagogies recognise learners as individuals, connected to family, community, social, and cultural contexts (Rigney, 2019; Rigney & Hattam, 2018). These pedagogies regard the diversity of individuals as strengths, seek to utilise these strengths to create pathways for educational success for all (Souto-Manning et al., 2019), and regard the classroom and school as sites for promoting social justice and social change (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Culturally responsive pedagogies also acknowledge the role of place, regarding place as a dynamic

resource for learning and teaching. Culturally responsive pedagogies assume that place matters to people and that the elements of economy, geography, demography, history, governance, and policy – both positive and negative – connect people to place. In this way, place is constructed and re-constructed as heterogeneous: and, as a consequence, is often contested (Corbett, 2020).

The enactment of culturally responsive pedagogies and achievement of positive educational outcomes both require that learning and teaching are responsive to the life-worlds and experiences of learners. Enacting this requires curriculum, pedagogy, and practice to recognise and create space for diverse world views, particularly Indigenous world views (Martin, 2009). To achieve this, Jannok Nutti argues for the importance of a strong and informed teacher base, where teachers have the knowledges and capabilities required to promote education that combines cultural relevance with national standards. In her Norwegian context, these knowledges and capabilities pertain particularly to Sámi worldviews and cultural-based education. Contemporary responses to the assimilationist legacy of historical policies and governance related to Sámi peoples and education emphasise the importance of these being incorporated into teacher education programs for all prospective teachers.

Burke, Toope, and Boison also highlight the importance of integrating Indigenous ways of knowing and teaching in an elementary school context in Newfoundland (Canada). They note that even teachers with deep commitments to equity and social justice can struggle to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and being, as they confront challenging histories and policies and their own uncertainty about approaching disturbing content. In the situation reported in this chapter, engagement in collaborative practice utilising post-colonial children's literature, and support from external researchers contributed to the transformation of teacher practice for, and student understandings of, Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Focusing also on teacher practice, Windsor and Kers report efforts by one teacher to promote awareness of Sámi history and culture and to challenge stereotypical understandings of Sámi people, knowledges, experiences, and culture. Acknowledging historical oppression and displacement, as well as ongoing discrimination, the authors describe the development of a unit of work for secondary students that challenged them to confront colonizing legacies as well as contemporary efforts to redress these. The basis of this work was drawn from opportunities to build awareness and to seek to understand the impact of colonisation. These were integrated with students' consideration of their own positioning and contributions to a socially cohesive classroom. The studies outlined by Burke et al., and Windsor and Kers remind us that teachers play important roles in the construction of places where they and their students can build the confidence and competence to challenge stereotypes, confront legacies of exclusion and inequity, and promote learning and teaching that is responsive to the life-worlds and experiences of learners. These are the spaces created by culturally responsive pedagogies.

Teacher education has an important role to play in promoting culturally responsive pedagogies: so too does ongoing professional learning, such as that demonstrated by teachers in the chapters described above. Óskarsdóttir and Wozniczka

describe their planning and delivery of a distance-mode professional learning course that sought to use and encourage inclusive approaches. Engaging in distance learning and teaching is a reality for many and can generate challenges for those advocating for the importance of building understandings of place and context into any course. Recognising this challenge, Óskarsdóttir and Wozniczka focused on creating a learning community among course participants. Reflections on the design and delivery of the course acknowledge challenges in responding to diversity among participants and the influence of peer pressure and leadership on building a community of practice.

Valuing and responding to language diversity as a basis for equity and inclusion is a thread uniting several chapters. In their analysis of culturally responsive pedagogies in Faroese and Icelandic education policies, Vijayarathan and Óskarsdóttir concluded that “educational policy in both countries appears ill-equipped to support schools to work systematically with students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds”. Rather than drawing on students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds as strengths, and utilising these as resources to guide learning and teaching, the authors report some apparent contradictions, particularly around the use of language. With both Faroese and Icelandic languages considered vulnerable in a global context of immigration and commerce, policies emphasised these as the languages of instruction and were unclear about how teachers might respond to or incorporate the ‘other’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds of learners.

Ensuring recognition of heritage or minority languages within dominant majority linguistic contexts is also addressed by Beaton et al., who argue that language revitalisation depends not only on opportunities to study these languages as a subject, but also opportunities to use them in social and informal settings. They conclude that language “must be used in everyday communication in the community for it to survive”. This approach highlights connections between language and cultural identity as outlined by Vijayarathan and Flotskaya et al.

Culturally responsive pedagogies integrate respect for diversity with recognition of the importance of place. An example of this is provided by Bjøru in her description of multi-grade teaching in a rural school. The essence of multi-grade teaching is recognising and responding to diversity, since every class group incorporates learners with diverse experiences, understandings, knowledges, skills, and expectations.

Engaging with culturally responsive pedagogies requires recognition that positive educational outcomes encompass personal and social, as well as academic outcomes. However, Demant-Poort and Andersen observe that academic outcomes tend to be those reported and valued by many. In their investigations of student perspectives of their school experiences, the social environment – particularly the dispositions and interactions of teachers and students – was emphasised as important. This study serves as a reminder that culturally responsive pedagogies acknowledge the value of multiple perspectives and utilise these to recognise learners as individuals, albeit with connections to family, community, social, and cultural contexts.

## 16.4 Conclusion

While the chapters in this volume examine educational equity and inclusion in the Circumpolar North, they provide much food for thought for those of us who live and work outside this region. They encourage us to consider what it is like to live, work, and be in *this* place within the Circumpolar North and, in doing so, provide a platform for us to recognise the ways in which economy, geography, demography, history, governance, and policy interact in the construction and reconstruction of our own places. Such considerations serve as prompts for us to reflect on the social relations that constitute each place and the ways in which they inform learning and teaching.

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