Yukon

In the Yukon, a “Global Education Committee” brings together members from schools and the territory’s department of education to discuss relevant issues, topics and pedagogical strategies related to global education. This committee, along with strong support for global education within the Yukon Department of Education, has led to a stronger overall engagement with global education than we found in our other cases. In addition, the Yukon seems to have successfully modified a curriculum “borrowed” from BC to meet the needs of a diverse (predominantly First Nations), and geographically remote population. In 2004, First Nations students represented approximately 28.5 per cent of the total student population in the Yukon (Yukon Government, 2004). Also of note is the fact that the Francophone population has doubled in the past 20 years (Canadian Heritage, 2006). Both innovation and responsiveness characterize the global education experience in the Yukon.

However, our research suggests that there is some disparity in the attention global education receives in schools serving different populations. Significant challenges remain in terms of:

- Addressing basic literacy and numeracy competency capacities of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or circumstances (particularly in small, marginalized communities).
- Making global education “real” to students, with particular emphasis on the development of more effective teaching and learning materials (e.g., videos, maps and books) and the hosting of more guest speakers.
- Finding ways to evaluate the impact of global education and/or to show how it is relevant to social transformation.

Background

The Yukon’s educational system serves a relatively small population, but is distinguished by the large number of First Nations students it serves. At the time of our study there were 28 public schools (23 elementary schools) and one French First-Language kindergarten-Grade 12 school in the Yukon; serving 3,089 elementary-age children (Yukon Department of Education, 2005a), with 491 teachers in 2002/03 (Nault, 2004). Because of the Yukon’s small size, there is no intervening educational authority between the Yukon Department of Education and schools in the territory. In addition, the Yukon does not develop its own curriculum: at present it uses British Columbia’s curriculum at the elementary level.

Table 10.1 offers key demographic details that set the socioeconomic and political context of global education in the territory.
The Yukon has innovatively adapted the BC curriculum to reflect local needs and conditions, specifically by fostering experiential programs reflecting traditional First Nations learning styles, and providing support for French-language programs (Yukon Department of Education, 2005b). It has also established an Internet-based Youth Education Student Network (YESNET), including an active site where students and teachers can upload their projects for others to see. To address the disparity of First Nations and non-First Nations student outcomes, the government established an Education Reform Project in 2005, to “make changes in the education system to better meet the needs of First Nations” (Yukon Education Reform Project, n.d., p.1). Similar to trends in other Canadian provinces, the Yukon mandates standardized testing in literacy and numeracy (Yukon Department of Education, 2005b).

Because the Yukon uses BC’s education curriculum, we drew on our analysis of that province’s curriculum while conducting this case study. We also interviewed two staff members at the Yukon Department of Education and visited two schools.

### TABLE 10.1
**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: YUKON**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Ethnic Groups</td>
<td>British; European; Aboriginal; French; Asian and African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>1,522 million (CDN$) (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Economic Sectors</td>
<td>Mining; Manufacturing; Hydroelectricity; Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Political Parties at the Provincial Level</td>
<td>Yukon Party (formerly “Progressive Conservative”); NDP; Liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premier</td>
<td>Honourable Dennis Fentie (Yukon Party)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 10.1
SAMPLING STRUCTURE OF INTERVIEWS FOR YUKON CASE STUDY**
Global Education at the Territory Level

Global education in the Yukon curriculum

The formal curriculum in the Yukon is based on the BC curriculum, with modifications made to enhance its relevance to the needs of the territory. Social Studies is the area in which BC’s education system has the highest concentration of “global education” related topics, but the BC curriculum has not been revised in more than five years. However, according to one of the two participants we spoke with at the Yukon Department of Education, the BC curriculum lacks a formal definition of global education, and similarly does not offer specific guidelines on the implementation of global education. Thus much of the global education effort in the Yukon “comes from the individual research of teachers” (Yukon Territory 1).

While there is no formal definition of global education in the Yukon curriculum, elements of the global education “ideal type” were evident in the definition of the term offered by one of the participants (who was identified by several other participants as a “leader” in global education in the Yukon). Specifically, this participant’s definition emphasized cultivating a spirit of civic responsibility among students (the concept of “global citizens” was also employed), and rooting students in a strong sense of the interconnectedness of the world’s peoples and the need for critical understanding of “the world they live in.” The importance of critical thinking about global “inter-relatedness” was echoed by the second participant we spoke with at the Yukon Department of Education, who made specific reference to the interrelated impacts of various cultures.

Department of education officials were particularly keen to have the input of First Nations people into the curriculum development process: in their view this would “only improve the status of global education.” The department has a First Nations consultant who represents all 17 First Nations in the Yukon. This consultant and several others are working to introduce new content into the curriculum and have also been involved in piloting “First Nations Education” in the territory.

With the same emphasis as found in our global education ideal type on developing critical thinking skills among students, one Yukon Department of Education official identified the goal of the curriculum as “…to get kids talking about issues and to look at them from more than one perspective” (Yukon Territory 1). While it was suggested that global education was stronger at the high school level, the official firmly believed that for global education to be more effective, children needed earlier exposure to relevant issues, knowledge and skills.

Territory-level curriculum support and resources

More than a dozen consultants develop curricula and work with classroom teachers to implement the curricula in the Yukon. Department officials felt that while more resources are required to strengthen global education in schools in the Yukon, support for teachers was even more critically important because “teachers must go beyond the available resources to make them effective” (Yukon Territory 1).

Professional development is readily available to teachers in the Yukon and is strongly supported with an “above-average” budget for professional development activities. According to one participant, the Human Rights Commission and the Yukon Development and Education Commission (YDEC) have played active roles in supporting global education in the Yukon through the provision of resources and in some cases, guest speakers. There is “good dialogue” between schools and NGOs in Whitehorse, the Yukon’s capital city. However, no specific groups were mentioned. The Yukon Teacher’s Association (YTA) was also identified as playing a “secondary role, in terms of broad [global education] initiatives” (Yukon Territory 2). Participants from the Yukon Department of Education also perceived there was “a lot” of parental involvement at the school level on the development of global education in classrooms.
Although not meeting at regular intervals, a “Global Education Committee” has been established, which brings together teachers and administrators to discuss, share and plan ideas and initiatives around global education. Teachers also communicate with other teachers and education professionals on a regular basis as well as actively engaging in “resource-swapping.” It was clear that the people we spoke with supported child-centred approaches to teaching, and favoured a “whole-school” approach to teaching global issues.

**Implementation of global education**

Based on insights offered by the territory-level participants, there is some disparity between the time spent on First Nations topics and those more broadly defined as “global education” topics within the Social Studies curriculum. Schools in Whitehorse were more actively engaged in global education initiatives, reflective of the broader range of content, skills and attitudes advocated within the ideal type, whereas schools in smaller communities outside of Whitehorse tended to focus more on Aboriginal issues in their Social Studies content. However, this disparity in areas of focus should not obscure the fact that participants themselves made explicit connections between “Aboriginal issues” and “global education,” and indeed felt that the large First Nations population of the Yukon influenced the approach taken towards global education in the public education system, both within and beyond Whitehorse.

Reflecting on past individual teaching practices, one Yukon Department of Education staff member suggested that 70 percent of her/his time was spent directly or indirectly covering topics relevant to global education. This participant was clearly supportive of a “holistic” approach to strengthening global education in the public education system that would raise issues across a range of subject areas, “from math to literature.” The participant suggested that global education be introduced at “an even younger age,” and particularly that the concept of “interconnectedness” and the construct of the “global citizen” be emphasized even at a “very basic level” from a child’s first school years.

**Challenges**

Both department of education officials we interviewed had difficulty identifying challenges to the development of global education in the Yukon school system. However, one participant emphasized that global education issues often provoked strong emotional responses in children, and therefore teachers have to approach such issues sensitively so as not to “overwhelm” children and thus constrain learning. For this reason, the other participant felt that it was important to recognize that some teachers were uncomfortable teaching certain issues (the example of “child labour” was offered here) and that greater attention to addressing teacher preparedness and comfort in relation to global education was required. Officials thought that the imperatives of equipping teachers with the tools and knowledge they required for effective integration of global education in their classrooms meant that teachers needed to become more “technologically savvy” and better able to use web-based resources.

A final challenge to be noted here concerns the lack of formal strategies for monitoring progress, or evaluating teachers’ effectiveness in conveying global education issues in the classroom. However, both participants felt that considering the perceived receptiveness of teachers toward global education, the Yukon fared quite well in terms of exposing students to global education-related issues. Moreover, both participants expressed the idea that the Yukon Department of Education was adequately providing teachers with appropriate resources and professional development opportunities supportive of strengthening global education in classrooms.
Global Education at the School Level

Two principals and six teachers were interviewed in the two schools in this study. The first was a French Immersion school with about 250 students with very few First Nations students. The second school had about 10 per cent of its 400 children classified as First Nations students.

Our participants in these Yukon schools offered broad definitions of global education that highlighted issues rather than providing more precise descriptions of the term’s philosophy, goals and content. We noted that global education did not figure prominently in the formal curriculum, and most topics were subsumed under Social Studies. While direction from principals and the Yukon Department of Education concerning global education was important, teachers took the lead in keeping global education visible in their classrooms. As one teacher stated, “We would like to portray our school as a worldly place, an inclusive place. One of our goals is to see more global education covered in the classroom” (Yukon School 2a).

For the educators and principals we spoke to, global education meant exploring the interconnections among people, places and the natural environment. Educators felt that using a comparative approach to teach global education enabled children to gain awareness of Canadian society, the role of the government, as well as their own cultural backgrounds. While participants in some of our other cases suggested that some global education issues were “too complex” or elicited difficult emotional responses, one teacher we spoke with strongly felt that global education should seek to instill a sense of hope in students through the cultivation of a sense of personal responsibility and agency (willingness to take action). As one principal stated:

*We are a small planet... if you want to fight for social justice... then children need to be made aware... Multinationals are where the problem is. Students need to know what propaganda is. Students need to know that it is a myth that the third world depends upon the first world. Kids need to develop greater empathy for others, and dispelling myths is key.* (Yukon School 1a)

In the more affluent of the two schools we visited, there was a stronger interest in global education, and the educators we spoke with defined global education in accordance with our ideal type. While interviewees emphasized raising awareness of issues “outside North America,” they also strongly connected such efforts to the need for “ownership for being a global citizen.” Thus, several participants spoke of approaching global education through making local-global links, comparison and critical discussion on issues of global interconnections in environmental, social, cultural, and economic spheres, with questions of equity and social justice figuring prominently.

In contrast to the schools we visited in other cases, there was a strong push for global education to move beyond “charity” or “fundraising” activities for “poor” people, and for a more holistic implementation of global education activities and issues across subjects – “I ask my teachers to be as involved as possible – not to get on the bandwagon [with things like fundraising for the tsunami], but to make sure our funding is used locally first” (Yukon School 1a).

**School-level support and resources**

While global education figured quite prominently in the classrooms and schools of the educators we spoke with, the idea that “institutional support is definitely lacking” was highlighted as a key constraint on the development of global education in the system. This was in marked contrast to the perception of territory-level participants who, as noted above, thought the Yukon Department of Education was providing “adequate” support for global education. Nonetheless, most participants also conceded that opportunities for professional development were supported by the Yukon Teachers Association and the Yukon Department
of Education; however, they offered no specific examples of professional development opportunities. The principal of one school we visited highlighted their “up-to-date resource centre” that had, “many lesson plans for global education topics… there are many lessons related to social justice” (Yukon School 1a). Indeed, one teacher went as far as to suggest, “Resources are not an issue... there is so much out there” (Yukon School 1d).

However, it was clear that the teachers we spoke with relied largely on their own Internet-based research as well as their own resource collections: “… textbooks are outdated; the Internet has videos, photos, and up-to-date issues” (Yukon School 2c).

For most, the problem was less a lack of materials but a lack of time. Teachers have difficulty sifting through numerous available online resources. They also have to focus on math and literacy. To address this problem, educators suggested that the ministry develop a website dedicated to disseminating information, ideas and resource materials that are “ready to use.” Another theme introduced by educators and similar to the Manitoba case, was that teachers were skeptical of the factual basis of some of the information that they came across and were therefore less inclined to introduce it in their classrooms.

Participants at the schools we visited thought that they would like to have more professional development opportunities “mandated by the ministry,” and specifically that the Yukon Department of Education should coordinate professional development activities that facilitate information-sharing and dialogue among educators concerning global education teaching and learning. One participant emphasized the weak horizontal relationship between schools and suggested that greater effort was needed to “get all teachers on board” for effective global education in the system.

**Challenges**

Participants stressed that to be effective, global education needed to be “relevant” and “hands-on.” For one of the teachers, global education was difficult to implement because of the “very low academic level” of her class that required her to spend a large part of her time on “basic reading and writing” (Yukon School 1b).

When discussing the formal curriculum, some educators thought that global education should be a separate subject area, “distinct from Social Studies.” One teacher offered specific insights into what was needed to strengthen global education in a way that connects with the active learning dimension of the ideal type:

> There should be something mandated through the curriculum that puts something far more active in motion...In Grade 6, students are asked to be a global citizen, but what is missing is their actual participation. There should be fewer topics covered, and they should be studied for more prolonged periods. Many issues are touched upon, but there is not enough depth. (Yukon School 2a)

One area of concern that did emerge as a dominant theme was the issue of evaluation – or lack thereof. Participants noted that there were no formal evaluation or monitoring mechanisms for global education activities, except informal assessment and/or encouragement by either principals or by teachers themselves. More than in any of the other cases, the participants we spoke with in the Yukon seemed to focus on the idea that “… it’s hard to measure effectiveness of global education…”

However, beyond mentioning these particular challenges, most of the educators we spoke with were hard-pressed to identify any challenges at all. One educator concluded:
There are no hard or fast rules. We are not given a lot to teach the issues, and they're kind of warm and fuzzy. I would like to see harder facts, and make global education more realistic through Social Studies (Yukon School 1b).

**Innovations**

The most striking innovation in the Yukon case is the Global Education Committee spearheaded by the Yukon Department of Education officials, but including teachers from the two schools we visited as well. The committee is an informal forum for high school and elementary teachers who believe that education is a vehicle for the development of global citizens.

**Partnerships**

When asked about the engagement of external organizations, participants generally identified UNICEF and discussed the “orange box” fundraising drive at Halloween. However, beyond UNICEF, none of the participants identified any other external partners in global education initiatives within their schools. However, all were very supportive of the idea of NGOs participating and supporting global education.

Additionally, a couple of the educators we spoke with identified some parental involvement in global education initiatives in their classrooms. While no specific examples were provided, educators emphasized that, for the most part, parents were very supportive of global education in the classroom.

While participants from the Yukon Department of Education mentioned the role of the Human Rights Commission and the Yukon Development and Education Commission (YDEC) as well as the Yukon Teachers’ Association (YTA), none of the school-level participants mentioned these groups. This response suggests a gap in terms of the vertical relationship between educators and territory-level personnel. Furthermore, the perception at the department level that there was substantial inter-school partnering around global education, was not entirely borne out in the findings from participants at the two schools we visited. While one teacher suggested that “ideas were floating around” and that there would likely be more partnerships between schools concerning global education initiatives in the future, at the time of the study, there was no mention of such partnerships, except for the occasional references to fundraising initiatives that may link schools. In one instance, a teacher highlighted the “letter-writing projects that go on between schools” and gave an example of one such initiative that connected students from a school in the Yukon with those in a school in Afghanistan.

**Advice from educators for external partners**

Yukon educators believed that external partners need to find effective ways to support the holistic integration of global education across the formal and informal curricula and to help “make learning more relevant.” Hosting guest speakers was perceived as one of the best ways to “connect kids to real issues.” Additionally, they suggested that more “ready-to-use” resources were needed, with particular emphasis on the development of age-appropriate web-based resources, and other visual aids. Educators firmly asserted that external partners should refrain from sending unsolicited materials.

Overall, educators emphasized that any resources and programs that were developed need to focus on “getting students talking about issues,” implying that a strong critical thinking component was needed. The single most important step an external partner could take is to “make solid connections with teachers and figure out how to appropriately deliver global education themes.”
Summary

Overall, our work in the Yukon suggested that global education - including the idea of active citizenship and critical thinking — was strongly supported at the territory and at the school levels. Part of the consensus we found concerning the importance of global education comes from the Global Education Committee. However, while there was considerable momentum driving the inclusion of global education in Yukon schools, even our small sample suggested that there was disparity in term of the coverage of global education issues. Much more research is needed into the variation and opportunities for global education in schools with large First Nations populations. Yet overall, the Yukon is among the most innovative and responsive examples of global education in our study.

ENDNOTES:

1 Public schools include English; French First-Language; French Immersion and Catholic (Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2005).
2 All information presented in this table is from Yukon Government (n.d.). Home.
4 YESNET. (n.d.) Online Student Projects.
5 In this section we combine the “Province/Territory” level with that of the analysis and reporting of the “District” level found in the other cases.