Indigenous Education Leads' Stories of Policy Enactment: A Sociomaterial Inquiry

Sarah Burm

Dalhousie University

Abstract

Investing in Indigenous education has been identified as a key priority by provinces and territories across Canada. In response, the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) introduced the *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (the Framework). This policy directive outlines the OME's commitment to working in partnership with Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational stakeholders to increase the capacity of the public education system to respond to the learning and cultural needs of the estimated 50,312 Indigenous students who attend Ontario's 5,000 elementary and secondary schools. While substantial progress has been made since the Framework's release, more work is needed to ensure all students gain an understanding of, and appreciation for, Indigenous cultures, experiences, and perspectives. One way the OME has shown their continued investment is through the sustained allocation of funds for Indigenous Education Leads (Leads). Since the Framework's release in 2007, these individuals have played an invaluable role in supporting the implementation of the Framework. However, little is known about their lived experiences. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative paper is to share Leads' stories of policy enactment, particularly their approaches to fulfilling a provincial mandate that carries with it the legacy of historical and contemporary trauma and mistrust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The principles of Critical Narrative Research (CNR) combined with the sensibilities of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) are drawn on to foreground how Leads understand their own actions and interactions throughout the policy implementation process, as well as how they come to understand the actions, interactions, and intentions of other materialities of practice (e.g., professionals, standardized tests, curricula, bodies, and routines) within their milieus.

Keywords: Indigenous education, education policy, sociomaterial, narrative inquiry

Introduction

For years, public education in Canada has been identified as requiring substantial reform to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students (Bains, 2014; Battiste, 1998, 2002, 2013; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002; Government of Canada, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Graduation rates for Indigenous students, while improving, remain lower than other population groups in Canada (Gordon & White, 2014; Statistics Canada, 2011, 2018), Recognizing this, provinces and territories have taken significant steps to enhance Indigenous education and address the challenges and systemic issues that continue to impact Indigenous student success across the K-12 education system (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2010). In 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) introduced the *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and In-*

uit Education Policy Framework (the Framework). The Framework outlines the OME's commitment to working in partnership with Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational stakeholders to increase the capacity of the public education system to respond to the learning and cultural needs of the estimated 50,312 Indigenous students who attend Ontario's 5,000 elementary and secondary schools (Government of Ontario, 2007). The Framework identifies specific goals aimed at improving education outcomes for Indigenous students and supporting educators in increasing their knowledge and understanding of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, so they can begin to integrate Indigenous material and teaching methods into their classrooms in respectful and meaningful ways. The OME set the year 2016 as its target for ensuring these goals were achieved (Government of Ontario, 2007).

While there have been significant accomplishments with respect to improved curricular initiatives, knowledge sharing, and collaboration between school boards and Indigenous community partners (Government of Ontario, 2009, 2013, 2018; Kearns, 2013; People for Education, 2016), there is undoubtedly more work needed to close the gap in educational attainment for Indigenous peoples. Recognizing this, the OME remains committed to enhancing the education system in ways that are responsive to and inclusive of Indigenous students. One way they have shown their continued investment is through the sustained allocation of funds for Indigenous Education Leads (Leads). The primary responsibility of the board-designated Leads is to work closely with senior administration in enhancing their school board's capacity to implement the goals of the Framework (Government of Ontario, 2016). Since the Framework's release in 2007, these individuals have played an invaluable role in supporting the implementation of the Framework. However, little is known about their experiences aside from what has been formally reported within the Framework and subsequent progress reports. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study is to examine Leads' lived experiences implementing the Framework, making visible the unrecognized aspects of Leads' work, particularly their experiences fulfilling a provincial mandate that carries with it the legacy of historical and contemporary trauma and mistrust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The following research questions guide this inquiry:

1. What are the lived experiences of Indigenous Education Leads as they support the work described in the Framework?
2. How might their stories inform future adaptation and implementation of the Framework?

What follows is a series of short vignettes grounded in the experiences of Leads to understand the ways in which their professional work has been influenced by the Framework since its inception in 2007. The principles of Critical Narrative Research (CNR) combined with the sensibilities of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) are drawn on to foreground how Leads understand their own actions and interactions throughout the policy implementation process, as well as how they come to understand the actions, interactions, and intentions of other materialities of practice (e.g., professionals, standardized tests, curricula, bodies, and routines) within their milieus.

Theoretical and Methodological Positioning

The decision to foreground Leads' experiences enacting the Framework led to the adoption of critical narrative inquiry for its ability to capture how policy involves "negotiation, contestation or struggle between different groups who may lie outside the formal machinery of official policy making" (Ozga, 2000, p. 2). As Ball, Maguire, & Braun (2012) indicate, most policy work takes place on the bedrock of larger educational discourses. CNR acknowledges this view, seeking to illuminate how human experience and relationships are situated and entangled within complex contexts (Iannacci, 2007). Moreover, CNR affords the methodological space required to allow "wondering, tentativeness, and alternative views to exist as part of the research account" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 25), recognizing that individuals understand themselves and their world through a variety of interpretive processes that are socially constructed and culturally rooted within larger structural conventions and customs (Hendry, 2010; Spector-Mersel, 2010).

While educational policy may not explicitly tell us what to do, it can certainly create, narrow, or change how particular goals or educational outcomes are set and measured. Policy can also, as Ball (1994) suggests, redistribute voices so that certain stories are privileged while others go unheard. In response, I attempt here to augment the "voice" of materiality to emphasize the messiness, fluidity, and performative nature of policy enactment. I sought to better understand how educational policy works on and through Leads, in ways that are often invisible but can lead to certain actions being carried out at particular moments in time. I wondered what other "forces" are at play as Leads work to mobilize the Framework

within their situated environments? What impact have these forces had on how the Framework has been enacted to date, and how have Leads been transformed through the process?

At the forefront of this inquiry was an interest in better understanding and describing the unrecognized aspects of Leads' work, specifically how materialities of practice (e.g., professionals, self-identification data, curricula, bodies, and routines) enable/prevent certain practices, tasks, or outcomes to be accomplished within each Leads' professional context. This inquiry is not to disregard the individual and their lived experiences; on the contrary, it is to be cognizant of the fact that what individuals do in their everyday practice is bound in materiality (Orlikowski, 2007). To explore this view further, I drew on the sensibilities of Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

ANT can be described as a socio-material approach to understanding how human processes and non-human entities are inextricably bound and thus influence how education practice, including the enactment of policy, are perceived, enacted, and sustained (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011). From this perspective, dualistic distinctions between human and non-human, nature and culture, begin to unravel, and any previous notions of the world as a system of stable and fixed structures are challenged. Positioned within a network ontology, ANT traces the ways things come together, how both the human and non-human are performed into being, and how they manage to hold together in networks that continually assemble and reassemble to produce certain effects, particular actions, forms of knowledge, objects, and discursive processes; some of these positionings might even challenge the intended objectives of the Framework (Fenwick, 2014; Hamilton, 2001, Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011). Rather than imply that there is a dominant agent responsible for the enactment and mobilization of policy from text to action, ANT recognizes that both social (cultural discourses, symbols) and material (technology, humans, objects) actors are critical contributors to the "mangle of practice" (Pickering, 1993, p. 567) inherent in how the enactment of education policy unfolds (Fenwick & Landri, 2012; Hamilton, 2001; Latour, 2005; Orlikowski, 2007). Together, CNR and ANT bring a sense of balance to this research inquiry; CNR encourages us to pay attention to the lived experiences of participants and the knowledge gained from these experiences, while ANT reminds us not to ignore the non-human and what it is capable of.

Methods

The data presented in this paper draws on semi-structured interviews with 10 Leads who were involved in initiatives aimed at meeting the primary objectives outlined in the Framework. All Leads were able to confirm that their respective school board had policies and procedures in place for voluntary, confidential Indigenous student self-identification, and were able to confirm that they had students within their board who identified as having First Nations (status/non-status), Métis, and/or Inuit ancestry. Due to the span of time since the Framework's initial release, I approached Leads who currently or previously worked as an Indigenous Education Lead for either a Catholic or public school board in Ontario. All participants were recruited via email. Email addresses of participants currently in a Lead position were obtained through a third party at the Lead's school board or found on the school board's website. Former Leads were recruited through a process of snowball or chain sampling (Patton, 2002). At the time of data collection, three participants currently held positions as Leads and seven formerly held the position for a period between 2007-2015.

Four of the ten participants self-identified as First Nations. Of the remaining six participants, two identified as Métis and four participants identified as non-Indigenous. All participants identified as female. Participants' experiences, prior to their appointment, were diverse. Participants identified largely as educators, with extensive experience working in private and public education, on and off reserve, at both the elementary and secondary level. Three of the ten participants were not Ontario certified educators but previously completed graduate studies in education or a complementary discipline. All Leads declared that they had both a personal and professional interest in Indigenous education.

During research interviews, participants were invited to share their stories of policy enactment. Rather than determine whether the Framework has been appropriately or wrongly implemented, I inquired into how Leads engaged with the Framework within their specific professional environment. Relying on the sensibilities of ANT in partnership with CNR, it was necessary that I consider how Leads' experiences were mediated by the materials and environments they worked within. I wanted to better understand what/who was mobilizing the Framework. What forms of knowledge were taken up, circulated, blocked, and/

or transformed through the policy enactment process? Interviews were audio-recorded, and transcripts were returned to participants for member checking. Participants' stories were then weaved into a series of vignettes through a process of restorying (Creswell, 2008). These vignettes were written to synthesize the research findings and provide readers with an aerial view of the complexities Leads encountered in their work enacting the Framework. The structural and design elements of fictional writing (Leavy, 2013) were employed to further illuminate Leads' experiences, as well as the non-human actors (technologies, student record systems, surveys, and so forth) that shaped Leads' identities and professional practices.

Participants were invited to review the vignettes to ensure the description of events, analytic commentaries, and evaluative perspectives included were representative of their experiences. Participants appreciated the opportunity to read and review the vignettes, and none of the 10 participants requested any substantial changes, additions, or deletions to the content of the vignettes beyond those that were grammatical in nature.

What follows is a series of vignettes that excavate some of what participants experienced and wrestled with during their enactment of the Framework. The rich descriptions of places, people, and situations that unfolds within the vignettes have been developed to generate a deeper understanding for you, the reader, about how policy influences the way Leads come to see their work and themselves. The lead character throughout the vignettes is Alexa, who serves as her school board's Indigenous Education Lead. Alexa identifies as Indigenous. The character of Alexa has been created to narrate participants' experiences. The setting for each vignette is fictional and has been generated based on descriptions of events and circumstances shared by participants. The interactions and dialogue between characters, as well as the internal monologues included throughout, are not representative of a single participant's experience but rather illustrative of the diversity of interactions Leads encountered in their professional lives and their impact. Rather than artificially disassociating the analysis from each of the vignettes, I have integrated the discussion of prominent themes throughout the remainder of the paper.

Shifting Priorities

"Has anyone seen this?" Alexa asks, advancing to the first slide in her presentation, an image of the Framework.

Weeks prior, a school principal had reached out to Alexa, asking if she would speak to his school staff on the topic of "Infusing Indigenous Perspectives into the Curriculum." During their conversation, the principal mentioned that he overheard a few teachers discussing how they didn't see why it was necessary for students to learn about residential schools and was unsure about the best way to tackle the topic with his teachers, admitting he too knew very little about residential schools. Alexa quickly assured him he had reached out to the right person, and they planned for her to present at their next staff meeting.

She glances out to her audience. She notices a few head nods, a couple of blank stares, and a few puzzled expressions. Alexa is not surprised by the array of responses to the picture of the Framework on the screen. In fact, she has grown to expect such responses. Many know such policy exists, but few are familiar with what this policy means for Indigenous peoples.

Alexa starts most of her staff presentations with the image of the Framework prominently displayed, which gives her work legitimacy. She recognizes that the yellow cover on the screen carries power. The yellow cover reminds administrators, educators, and support staff that there is a policy on Indigenous education, and it needs to be made a priority. No longer can people choose to talk about Indigenous education only when it is convenient for them.

Of course, she does not say any of this aloud to the teachers staring back at her; that would be too much information, too fast. Right now, staff need to know why this policy is not only important but why it is important to this board. Only when we stop reducing Indigenous knowledge to images of teepees and sugar cubed igloos will we be able to fully understand and appreciate the history and rich learning opportunities awaiting staff and students. She takes a deep breath and begins, "In 2007, the Ministry of Education identified Indigenous student success as one of its key priorities…"

For many Leads, the Framework provided a useful starting point for contextualizing the significance of their professional efforts. To finally have a policy dedicated to the educational achievement and en-

gagement of Indigenous students was no small feat. Having a material text to cite in conversation with other stakeholders enabled Leads to use the Framework as a bridge, an entry point into conversations with individuals who were previously inaccessible.

Participants were conscious of the fact that the Framework exerted a sense of legitimacy previously missing from discussions concerning Indigenous student achievement in Ontario. The Framework became an accountability mechanism for Leads—a tool they used for negotiating new rules, expectations, routines, and processes. The increased visibility of the Framework combined with a human face–someone like an Indigenous Lead, and in some cases, someone who self-identified as Indigenous–worked to further advance the Framework's legitimacy and credibility, forcing staff to engage in a conversation around policy enactment differently than if the Framework's image was not displayed. These strategic actions taken by Leads were not coincidental; on the contrary, they were deliberately planned and performed as a way of carving out a space for Indigenous education. Material objects (the Framework, Alexa's presentation) and practices (Alexa prompting her audience to look up at the image of the Framework) influence how both Alexa and the staff she is presenting to perceive of, understand, and respond to the Framework. This brief encounter enrolls individuals into a relationship with the Framework, even if only temporarily. The participants are forced into knowing that there exists a policy on Indigenous student achievement and, even further, the responsibility of making this policy a priority in their professional practice.

The Pendulum Swings

Halfway into the session, Alexa shifts her focus to the topic of Indigenous student achievement and well-being: "There is a significant gap in educational achievement between First Nations people living on reserve and the overall Canadian population. Based on recent census data, the education gap for students on reserve is widening. The 2011 Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada estimates that if steps are not taken to improve the current situation, it will take at least 28 years for First Nations communities to reach the national average." Alexa looks up from her notes. She sees a roomful of educators whose mouths are gaping open, shaking their heads in disbelief. "How is that possible?" asks a teacher sitting in the front row. Alexa pauses. She considers how best to respond, knowing everyone is intensely listening. Yet, how do you describe in a one-hour informational session, the impact of forced relocation, racism, the residential school system and the effect these events have had on relations between Canada's Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples? How do you inform people in a way that resonates? She begins, "I think it is important to look at this issue from a number of perspectives. Historically, the effects of colonization, the loss of culture, language, and traditional knowledges through the residential school system and other government policies have wreaked havoc on Indigenous communities, leaving many traumatized and feeling disempowered. Financially, research and government documents show us that students on reserve are systemically underfunded, receiving $2000-$3000 less per child in funding than students who attend provincial schools. Schools on reserve receive $0 for libraries, special education services, computers, software, and teacher training; $0 for extracurricular activities; $0 for the development of culturally responsive curricula, Indigenous language instruction, and pedagogical support. Yet statistically, the Indigenous population is the youngest and fastest growing population in Canada. In 2016, 1.6 million people identified as Indigenous, accounting for 4.9 % of the total population. Repeatedly promises are made by government officials to improve the learning conditions for students on reserve, but unfortunately, these promises often go unfulfilled, the reason always the same—not enough funding. Students begin to grow disheartened and left working from a disadvantage because of these systemic inequities in education."

Alexa sees in the eyes of her audience that the wheels are turning. She continues, delving deeper to personalize the issue, "Think of the school your children attend. If you knew there was a 28-year gap in educational achievement between your kids and the rest of Canada, what would your reaction be?"

"That wouldn't happen," responds one teacher. "We would not accept it. I know personally I would pull my kids out of that kind of learning environment," states another teacher.

Other teachers respond similarly. Alexa grows hopeful, sensing a shift in peoples' mindsets. Then, from the back of the room, she can't help but notice a woman who seems to be growing increasingly disgruntled with the direction the conversation is going. Having reached her tipping point, the woman finally stands and exclaims, "I think I have heard enough. With all due respect, Alexa, I cannot help but find your presentation somewhat racist, and it is making me uncomfortable. It is not helpful for anyone, especially Indigenous peoples, to be dwelling on the past. They need to move on." Alexa is taken back by the blast of words that just came out of the woman's mouth. Essentially, this teacher is saying Indigenous peoples need to "get over it." Although accustomed to hearing such responses, Alexa cannot help but feel dejected. Where do such comments originate? Are they rooted in fear? Discomfort? Sheer ignorance? Perhaps she assumed too quickly that today's group was beyond such shallow understandings.

The realization of how little colleagues knew about such things as the residential school system, treaty rights, the Indian Act, and even the denial by some school staff that Indigenous students were enrolled in their schools meant Leads were investing significant time and effort into ensuring board employees, across the spectrum, had a foundational understanding of these key issues and their ongoing effect on Indigenous students' experiences of schooling. Leads often encountered resistance throughout their daily work. Resistance was embedded in the attitudes of educators who asked, "Why do I have to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into my teaching when I don't have any Indigenous students in my class?" Resistance was felt at the school board level, whereby school board improvement plans dedicated a lot of time, energy, and focus to raising standardized test scores in literacy and numeracy, but mentioned little to nothing about increasing staff and students' cultural competency. In preparation for such encounters, some Leads would arrive at professional development sessions or consultation meetings armed with copies of the Framework and their board's self-identification policy. Others mentioned how they would draw on relevant research reports and statistics to position the goals of the Framework within their localized context. By deliberately drawing on supplementary material texts, like government sanctioned reports, Leads hoped they would have a better chance of shifting their colleagues' perceptions of Indigenous education.

Alexa takes a moment to collect her thoughts, reminding herself that comments like these make for great teachable moments. Slowly, she begins, "I can understand you don't want Indigenous peoples to let the past get in the way of their advancement, and I thank you for sharing your feelings publicly with the rest of the group. When we talk about educational achievement for Indigenous students, it is important to recognize that many of them face issues and challenges that are comparatively rare among other Canadians, but nonetheless impede their educational achievement. Perhaps I need to take a step back and clarify what I shared earlier. What I have been trying to convey throughout today's presentation is that colonization is ongoing and continues to impact students who identify as Indigenous because they are learning largely from a westernized perspective that unfortunately continues to mainly depict Indigenous peoples as existing only in the past, as part of fiction, as non-human, or as inanimate objects. Overemphasizing European exploration and history; perpetuating stereotypes of Indigenous peoples as violent, aggressive, and uncivilized; putting emphasis on traditional or historical aspects of Indigenous peoples to the exclusion of their contemporary realities; these are all examples of ongoing colonization, and it is still happening today. In fact, teaching Indigenous content without recognizing and acknowledging the diversity of perspectives between and within cultures, communities, languages, worldviews, organizations, and traditions is colonizing. We have a responsibility to honour the people who lived in this space before any of us. We can do better. We need our kids to be aware of our collective history, so when their turn comes to lead and make decisions and have an influence on how this country is shaped, they will be better informed than the people who came before them." Alexa looks out to the crowd. She quickly glances over in the direction of the woman who prompted her to delve into such a passionate speech and notices an empty chair. "Maybe next time," she thinks to herself. She sees the other teachers growing impatient and knows her hour is up.

"Okay everyone, I think that is all we have time for today. Please complete your session feedback forms before you leave today. Thanks, everyone."

As the staff disperses, Alexa collects the feedback forms and reflects on what just unfolded. She cannot assume educators have the cultural competency they need to both meet curriculum

expectations and critically engage and examine issues affecting and impacting students—families and communities included—who identify as Indigenous. Sometimes it feels like the weight of responsibility to ensure her board's staff are culturally competent falls singlehandedly on her shoulders. Incidents, like today's, signal the need for more cultural competency training not just for teachers but for all board staff. Having facilitated similar sessions within her board, she gets the impression that some of her colleagues have the mindset that Indigenous peoples, by virtue of their cultural and ethnic background, are somehow inferior; that students who identify as Indigenous are a problem that needs to be fixed. Alexa is not sure whether there is a real solid understanding among her colleagues that these issues are systemic, that there are reasons why educational outcomes for Indigenous peoples are different, and that they are influenced by a social structure based on separation, hierarchy, and competition. How do I get across to people that this is not an individual problem but rather a social justice issue? These are the thoughts Alexa grapples with while doing this work. More recently, she has begun to think critically about her role. She knows she has deliverables she must meet by the end of the school year, but what are the end goals of this work? What lasting impact are she and the board trying to make?

Leads acknowledged that elevating the professional discourse around Indigenous student achievement and engagement was often constrained by expressed prejudice toward Indigenous peoples, inadequate system support, and the perpetuation of institutional practices that, intentionally or not, undermined the Framework's effectiveness. These perspectives are evident in the brief interaction between the displeased teacher and Alexa during the professional development session. While incidences like these were frustrating for Leads to confront, they recognized that educators did not come to their experiences of discomfort on their own. Human (social relationships, regulatory bodies) and non-human entities (curriculum documents, textbooks, media portrayals of Indigenous peoples) throughout their professional and personal lives have, over time, exerted force to influence and produce how they come to assume their role as educators, what they denote as "legitimate" knowledge, and how they respond to different, perhaps unfamiliar, forms of knowledge. The exchange between the teacher and Alexa, as noted above, is the nexus whereby these tensions erupt with consequences for other practices, actors, identities, and so forth. For many Leads, these consequences included feelings of defeat and loneliness, the perpetuation of the status quo, a missed opportunity to critically engage a staff member, and the realization that there remain insufficient resources and support available.

A few days later, Alexa, her mind still whirling from the PD session, sees Vanessa, her predecessor at the board's Indigenous Advisory Committee (IAC) meeting. Alexa quickly takes a seat beside her, hoping she can provide some perspective and much needed guidance.

ALEXA: *Am I ever happy to see you! How are you?*

VANESSA: *Alexa! Hi! Here, I picked you up a coffee on my way here. Double cream, no sugar, right? I am doing well… busy, but that's not anything new. How have you been?*

ALEXA: *Thanks for this [taking a sip from her coffee]. I could use a pick me up. To be honest, I have been feeling quite unsettled these last few days. I facilitated a PD session a few days back at one school, and, well, I received some pushback from a few of the teachers who seemed quite misinformed and reluctant to develop their knowledge and skills to work with Indigenous students and families. It just seems sometimes that people are not interested. I cannot tell you how many times someone has said to me, "Oh, we don't have any self-identified First Nation students in our school," when, in fact, census data shows there are. Self-identification data has become a form of currency for me. It is only when I go into a school and say your school has 20 self-identified Indigenous students that administrators or teachers consider doing something. The data becomes evidence, prompting administrators to make Indigenous education a priority. I know what I am saying is not anything you have not experienced before. I guess I just feel kind of isolated doing this work. [Alexa pauses for a moment.] Sorry to lay all of this on you.*

VANESSA: *You don't have to apologize, Alexa. I have heard those comments more times than I care to admit. It can be frustrating feeling as though you are constantly having to compel people to work with you and make Indigenous education a priority. From the very be-*

ginning, I've seen the Framework as a document for all students. It is not just for Indigenous students, but for every student. I think where the lines get blurred is when we talk about implementation. When you read through the pages of the Framework, you quickly realize that the Ministry does not want to tell school boards how to do their jobs. The implementation piece is up to the boards. This is often where momentum can be gained or lost.

    ALEXA: *You are right. The Framework has been a great starting point, but I can't help but wonder whether the Framework is forcing anyone to do anything. You know what I mean? I know there are reports we have each had to complete, documenting our board's implementation of the Framework's goals, money spent, outcomes achieved, student success, and so on, but how do we know whether our board's response to what the Framework has set out has been effective? How do you know a teacher is teaching what they should in class? How do you know how principals are dealing with families? How do you know anyone is actually using the resources we provide them with? You just don't, right? And even though I can say what I have done, how do I ensure I am having a positive impact, and that the education, resources, and professional development I am promoting are making some kind of difference?*

    VANESSA: *All you can do is share what you know and try to explain to people why things are the way they are with our people. You are in a very challenging role, Alexa. Collaboration across the board is a barrier. I still get a sense that Indigenous education is in a silo, and nobody has a position quite like yours, which is another challenge of doing this work. If you only have one person like yourself doing everything, then it spreads your energies and resources thin.*

    ALEXA: *You can say that again. This is definitely not a 9-5 kind of job. But, you do the best you can, right?*

    VANESSA: *Right. You will continue to bump up against resistance and negative attitudes that you will be disgusted with, but just try to hold on. You must focus on what you can do and where you can have positive influence.*

    ALEXA: *You are right. Implementing policy is very complicated. Thanks for listening, Vanessa. Talking to you has put a lot of things into perspective for me.*

    VANESSA: *No problem. The position you are in requires diligence and patience. Hang in there, okay?*

    ALEXA: *I will do my best. Coffee is on me next time!*

    The conversation between Alexa and Vanessa exemplifies how social and material forces can organize and dominate human actors and their work. Comparable to the visual display of the Framework, the incessant reference to self-identification data was another example Leads shared as a strategy they relied on to situate themselves and their work within the safety of public education's institutional narrative. By positioning the importance of Indigenous education within empirical data, Leads felt they were in a better position to compel teaching and non-teaching staff to take appropriate, meaningful action. What arises through this discursive shift is the continued perpetuation of a dominant, largely westernized discourse that says it is permissible to use standardized measures of achievement and numerical data as a means of comparing one group of people to another. A certain degree of complicity emerges, letting the larger education system "off the hook" by allowing individuals to abdicate their responsibilities and Leads to shoulder the weight of the Framework as their cross to bear.

Discussion and Conclusion

The presentation of qualitative findings, represented through the vignettes and ensuing explanation of prominent themes, provide critical insight into what Leads have experienced in their roles as policy enactors since the release of the Framework in 2007. Utilizing a socio-material approach as the theoretical underpinning for this study draws attention to how embedded materiality is in how the Framework has been positioned and realized. This study is distinct from others involving the Framework because it foregrounds the qualities and contributions of material entities themselves, particularly the ways they act on policy and within educational processes (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011). While others have engaged in interpretive and critical analyses of the Framework (Anuik & Bellehumeur-Kearns, 2014; Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Cherubini, 2010; Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir, & Muir, 2010; Butler,

2015; Kearns & Anuik, 2015) little attention has been paid to the lived experiences of those responsible for operationalizing this policy.

Many Leads were grateful to have the Framework to refer to in their roles as policy enactors. Participants in the study saw the Framework as setting the foundation for change, a reference point as they attempted to introduce system-wide transformation, including targeted funding, professional development, and the integration of Indigenous perspectives across the K-12 curriculum. For others, an unwillingness on the part of certain policy actors to engage authentically with the Framework meant Leads were often inhibited in what they could and could not do as policy enactors. Leads were consistently having to bend their practice to accommodate for the social and material forces they regularly encountered. While on the surface, such adaptions on the part of Leads may be expected and relatively straightforward: when one traces the material specificities of these performances, what becomes apparent is how bodies, dispositions, and understandings are produced at the point of a situated performance in specific environments (Fenwick, 2010), involving an entanglement of emotional, political, and material elements.

All participants consistently noted that the provision of professional development was sorely needed for all staff, including educators, principals, senior leadership, secretaries, custodians, educational assistants, attendance officers, and librarians. While Leads did their best in delivering appropriate cultural awareness training, many of them acknowledged that they were only able to scratch the surface. The conditions Leads work within are mediated by a variety of agencies, policies, expectations, and assumptions that differ in nature from those of classroom educators, administrators, and school board personnel. By inviting Leads to share their stories, we can begin to identify and attend to the materialities of practice influential in their ongoing enactment of the Framework, enabling those involved in policy work to "tinker and improvise, to interrupt, and to seize emerging possibilities" (Fenwick, 2014, p.45). Within the context of this study, such emerging possibilities can include prompting stakeholders at the Ministry, school board, and individual school levels to consider how the Framework enables/prevents productive enactments of educational responsibility.

The findings above demonstrate the vast amount of work that still needs to occur in order to enable school systems and educators to respectfully and reciprocally respond to the learning and cultural needs of Indigenous students, their families, and communities. Undoubtedly, building educational leadership capacity and coordination for systemic change to occur takes time. Nevertheless, if the strategies, activities, and outcomes of the Framework are to be authentically achieved, it is necessary that the work of Indigenous Education Leads be meaningfully acknowledged and supported. School leaders need to ensure there are supports and mechanisms in place to attend to the compassion fatigue and work intensification that many Leads experience in the context of their professional practice. Increased staffing would alleviate some of the workload imbalance(s) described by participants. Delegating Indigenous education responsibilities across senior administrator portfolios would also ease the burden of responsibility that Leads are faced with, and would exemplify the key message that advocates in Indigenous education have been advancing for decades: that the enactment of Indigenous education is not the concern of one individual but the responsibility of all.

The findings presented in this paper aim to educate, raise awareness, build critical consciousness, and advance how educational stakeholders conceptualize and enact Indigenous education policy. It is hoped that this study leads school leaders and policymakers to better recognize the ebb and flow of how education policies, such as the Framework, are enacted and has demonstrated opportunities for interrupting and weakening those assemblages that continue to perpetuate potentially oppressive ideologies and behaviours.

References

Anuik, J., & Bellehumeur-Kearns, L. L. (2014). Métis student self-identification in Ontario's K-12 schools: Education policy and parents, families, and communities. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, 153*, 1-34.

Association of Canadian Deans of Education. (2010). *Accord on Indigenous education* [PDF]. Retrieved from http://csse-scee.ca/acde/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/08/Accord-on-Indigenous-Education.pdf

Bains, R. (2014). *Myths and realities of First Nations education* [PDF]. Retrieved from https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/myths-and-realities-of-first-nations-education.pdf

Ball, S. J. (1994). *Education reform: A critical and post-structural approach.* Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2012). *How schools do policy: Policy enactments in secondary schools.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Battiste, M. (1998). Enabling the autumn seed: Toward a decolonized approach to Aboriginal knowledge, language, and education. *Canada Journal of Native Education, 22*(1), 16-27.

Battiste, M. (2002). *Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education: A literature review with recommendations*. Ottawa, ON: Apamuwek Institute.

Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit.* Vancouver, BC: Purich Publishing Ltd.

Butler, J. K. (2015). The gap between text and context: An analysis of Ontario's Indigenous education policy. *in education, 21*(2), 26-48.

Canadian Council on Learning. (2009). *The state of Aboriginal learning in Canada: A holistic approach to measuring success* [PDF]. Retrieved from https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/deepeningknowledge/UserFiles/File/UploadedAmina_/2009SAL-ExecSum_EN.pdf

Cherubini, L. (2010). An analysis of Ontario Aboriginal education policy: Critical and interpretive perspectives. *McGill Journal of Education, 45*(1), 9-26.

Cherubini, L. & Hodson, J. (2008). Ontario Ministry of education policy and Aboriginal learners' epistemologies: A fundamental disconnect. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy. 79*, 1-33.

Cherubini, L., Hodson, J., Manley-Casimir, M., & Muir, C. (2010). 'Closing the gap' at the peril of widening the void: Implications of the Ontario Ministry of education's policy for Aboriginal education. *Canadian Journal of Education, 33*(2), 329-355.

Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies. (2002). *Learning about walking in beauty: Placing Aboriginal perspectives in Canadian classrooms.* Toronto, ON: Canadian Race Relations Foundation.

Creswell, J. W. (2008). Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Fenwick, T. (2010). (un)Doing standards in education with actor-network theory. *Journal of Education Policy, 25*(2), 117-133.

Fenwick, T. (2012). Matterings of knowing and doing: Sociomaterial approaches to understanding practice. In. P. Hager, A. Lee, and A. Reich (Eds.), *Practice, Learning & Change.* (pp. 67-84). New York, NY: Springer

Fenwick, T. (2014). Sociomateriality in medical practice and learning: Attuning to what matters. *Medical Education, 48*, 44-52.

Fenwick, T. & Edwards, R. (2010). Actor-network theory in education. New York, NY: Routledge.

Fenwick, T., Edwards, R., & Sawchuk, P. (2011). *Emerging approaches to educational research: Tracing the sociomaterial.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Fenwick, T. & Landri, P. (2012). Materialities, textures and pedagogies: Socio-material assemblages in education (2012). *Pedagogy, Culture, & Society, 20*(1), 1-7.

Gordon, C. E. & White, J. P. (2014). Indigenous educational attainment in Canada. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal, 5*(3), 1-28.

Government of Canada. (1996). *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples.* Retrieved from https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/royal-commission-aboriginal-peoples/Pages/final-report.aspx

Government of Ontario. (2007). *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* [PDF]. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/fnmiFramework.pdf

Government of Ontario. (2009). *Sound foundations for the road ahead: Fall 2009 progress report on implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* [PDF]. Retrieved from: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/SoundFoundation_ RoadAhead.pdf

Government of Ontario. (2013). *A solid foundation: Second progress report on the implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* [PDF]. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/ASolidFoundation.pdf

Government of Ontario. (2016). *Education Funding: Technical Paper* [PDF]. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1617/2016_technical_paper_en.pdf

Government of Ontario. (2018). Strengthening our learning journey: *Third progress report on the implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* [PDF]. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/indigenous/third-progress-report-en.pdf

Hamilton, M. (2001). Privileged literacies: Policy, institutional process and the life of the IALS. *Language and Education, 15*(2&3), 178-196.

Hendry, P. M. (2010). Narrative inquiry. Attending to the art of discourse. *Language and Literacy, 10*(1), 1-21.

Iannacci, L. (2007). Critical narrative research (CNR): Conceptualizing and furthering the validity of an emerging methodology. *Vitae Scholasticae, 24*, 55-76.

Kearns, L. L. (2013). The Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Policy Framework: A case study on its impact. *in education, 19*(2), 86-106.

Kearns, L. L., & Anuik, J. (2015). Métis curricular challenges and possibilities: A discussion initiated by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Policy in Ontario. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies, 12*(2), 6-36.

Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network theory.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press

Leavy, P. (2013). *Fiction as research practice: Short stories, novellas, and novels*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Orlikowski, W. J. (2007). Sociomaterial practices: Exploring technology at work. *Organization Studies*, *28*(09), 1435-1448.

Ozga, J. (2000). *Policy research in educational settings: Contested terrain.* Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research & evaluation methods. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

People for Education. (2016). *Moving toward reconciliation in Ontario's publicly funded schools* [PDF]. Retrieved from https://peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/P4E-Indigenous-Education-2016.pdf

Pickering, A. (1993). The mangle of practice: Agency and emergence in the sociology of science. *American Journal of Sociology, 99*(3), 559-589.

Pinnegar, S., & Daynes, G. D. (2007). Locating narrative inquiry historically. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 3-34). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Spector-Mersel, G. (2010). Narrative research: Time for a paradigm. *Narrative Inquiry, 20*(1) 204-224.

Statistics Canada. (2011). *The educational attainment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada – National household survey* [PDF]. Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/99-012-x2011003_3-eng.pdf

Statistics Canada. (2018). *First Nations People, Métis, and Inuit in Canada: Diverse and growing populations* [PDF]. Retrieved from https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/89-659-x/89-659-x2018001-eng.pdf?st=s9B_BSeD

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Calls to action* [PDF]. Retrieved from http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3