

Article

Truth Commissions and Teacher Education in Australia and the Northern Nordics

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Abstract: In Australia, like in several of the Nordic countries, truth commissions (TCs) are becoming part of the political and educational landscape. These developments are related to a global phenomenon over the past 40-odd years, where states are examining their relations to minority groups and/or Indigenous people, including acknowledging historical mistreatment and addressing remaining injustices. A common aim of these processes is to spread knowledge to the broader public via institutions for education. This paper focuses on ongoing TC processes in the Australian and Nordic contexts, with a specific focus on their potential consequences for teacher education (TE). By addressing barriers and possibilities on systemic, institutional, and practical levels of TE, the paper aims to develop an understanding of (1) how new knowledge produced through TCs meets the organization of teacher training; possible ways for TE to respond to new requirements; and (2) of the pedagogical and didactical challenges that might entail. The main argument is that a closer professional dialogue is needed between scholars engaged in TCs and TEs for TE to better respond to the requirements of TCs and for TCs to better recognize conditions for organizing TE.

Keywords: truth commissions; reconciliation; Indigenous knowledge teacher education; pedagogical development; cross-institutional cooperation; community engagement; Australia; Nordic



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1. Introduction

Recent developments in the northern Nordics—including truth commissions concerning Indigenous Sami communities vis-à-vis the different states (Norway, Sweden, and Finland), related preparations for knowledge-building campaigns, along with legislative requirements for teachers to address knowledge connected to the Sami in schools—have created new demands on teachers' knowledge and pedagogical skills. Likewise, in Australia, there are truth commissions (ongoing and planned) in multiple jurisdictions concerning the state's treatment of Indigenous people, and these are likely to have significant implications for the education sector broadly. This, in turn, puts growing pressure on institutions for higher education and teacher education (TE) when it comes to preparing future teachers for the task of teaching Indigenous knowledge in the contemporary classroom. However, in the Nordic context, there is limited space to sufficiently develop this dimension within existing TE structures, given their overcrowded curriculum and rigid structure. An additional challenge is the preparation of already practicing teachers for whom TE is no longer an option. Key concerns also connect to didactical questions on what kind of content, how, and to whom this knowledge is to be prepared and presented.

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are part of both the national curriculum and the mandatory professional standards for teachers and have been embedded in TE programs across the country, accordingly. Nevertheless, considerable systemic and attitudinal barriers remain, including an ad hoc landscape for

professional development (PD), the disproportionate exclusion of Indigenous students from schools (Hand et al. 2024), limited time and resourcing for teacher PD, TE academics' attitudes and beliefs (Hogarth 2022), and practicing teachers' fear and resistance.

This paper aims to identify implications for future teacher training in responding to TC processes in Australia and the northern Nordic states. To do so, we undertake an exploratory scoping review of existing research related to truth commissions (TCs), truth and reconciliation discourse, and teacher education across geographic contexts. From the review of research, we then identify barriers and opportunities for future teacher education across three levels: systemic, institutional, and practical. We discuss synergies and differences across the levels and geographic contexts with the aim to (a) strengthen knowledge in the area of TE and TCs, (b) contribute an up-to-date state of the field, and (c) facilitate cooperation and advance the transnational and cross-institutional dialogue within TE and about its future potentials.

1.1. Method and Research Question

This paper presents a scoping study of teacher education and truth commissions in Australia and the northern Nordics. A scoping study is used to examine the extent, range, and nature of research activity in this area. This method is useful for broadly mapping fields of study and establishing relevant gaps in the literature. As opposed to a systematic review, a scoping review is not typically used to assess quality, nor is it intended to be comprehensive, but tends to address broader topics where many different study designs might be suitable (Arksey and O'Malley 2005; Grant and Booth 2009). Our research question guiding the study was: what are some possible implications for future teacher training in responding to TC processes in Australia and the northern Nordic states? From our review of the literature, we developed the following sub-question: what are the barriers and opportunities for future teacher education across systemic, institutional, and practical levels? We used this sub-question to organize our subsequent discussion.

1.2. Australia—Historical Background

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' histories on the Australian continent span more than 60,000 years and are the oldest continuing human cultures in the world. There are more than 250 language groups on the Australian continent and some 800 dialects (AIATSIS 2024). In 1770, James Cook and crew of the British *Endeavour* 'claimed' possession of the eastern Australian continent for the British crown. In 1788, the invasion of the First Fleet at Kamay (Botany Bay) and the proclamation of the colony of New South Wales marked the start of British settler colonialism on the continent. The British claim was grounded in the fiction of *terra nullius*, the belief that the land 'belonged to no one', since discredited. There were no treaties signed between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and colonial governments in Australia. This failure has continued to structure the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the Australian state (Alison et al. 2022), which was founded in 1901 through the federation of the six self-governing British colonies. Unceded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty exposes the tenuous political legitimacy of the settler state, founded on illegal dispossession and violence. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were not recognized formally in the Constitution as part of the Australian population until 1967, and prior to that, states could create ad hoc policies aimed at dispossession and control, such as the removal of children and forced relocation. While the Constitution was changed in 1967, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have continued to campaign for self-determination and sovereign control over their own lives. In 2017, after an unprecedented series of regional dialogues, an Indigenous-led proposal for substantive, sequenced constitutional reform known as 'Voice Treaty Truth' was issued as the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Most recently, in October 2023, a national referendum (public vote) on the 'Voice' reform (a federal advisory body akin to the Sami Parliaments) was resoundingly defeated.

In Australia's federal system, power related to education is vested in state and territory governments. From the 1960s onwards, federal government influence in education has progressively increased, and federal reforms have aimed to achieve national consistency. In the first decade of the new millennium, a historically unprecedented set of federal reforms was implemented, including the development of a national curriculum, standardized national assessments in literacy and numeracy, national standards for teachers and principals, and a revised national model of school funding (Savage 2016). In Indigenous education, two key policy mechanisms were introduced: the Australian Curriculum's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority (CCP) and the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge in the mandatory professional standards for teachers (hereafter 'AITSL standards'). As Nakata has explained, Indigenous issues have been identified as mandatory professional knowledge for teachers and are explicit within a national curriculum in Australia for the first time (Nakata 2011; Patrick and Moodie 2016).

Truth-Telling and Seeking in Australia

From the earliest days of colonization, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have called for accurate historical accounting of colonial injustices, as well as histories of resistance, survival, and self-determination. The truth commission (TC) phenomenon is a recent innovation tied to the global rise of transitional justice since the 1980s. On the Australian continent, as was common across the British Empire, Royal Commissions (RCs) have been the favored instrument of governments. RCs are a non-judicial public inquiry into matters of great importance. There have been several RCs in the state's treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The 1987–1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths and Custody (RCADIC) exposed the systemic extent of institutional racism and violence that characterized the criminal justice system, leading to the disproportionate and unjust overrepresentation of Indigenous people within. A subsequent inquiry (albeit not an RC), the 1995–1997 National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People from their Families (Bringing Them Home report), exposed the removal of generations of children from their families, communities, land, and culture and showed how removal practices were legal, systematic, and sanctioned by the highest levels of government. Both commissions focused closely on the historical role of education policies and institutions in systemic injustice, including in the removal of children and in connections between schooling systems and contact with the criminal justice system. Both reports made recommendations for the reform of education, but many of these have not been implemented.

At the present juncture, Australia's first formal truth and justice commission, the Yoorrook Justice Commission (YRJC), is ongoing in the state of Victoria until 2025. Yoorrook's mandate is to inquire into both historical and ongoing injustices against First Peoples in Victoria since colonization. In lieu of a coordinated federal approach to enacting the 'Voice, Treaty, Truth' reform sequence, in the state of Victoria, a First Peoples' advisory body was established in 2019, and truth-telling and treaty negotiations are underway. A recent issues paper released in late 2023 shows the YRJC is turning its investigation towards systemic injustices in the Victorian school system.

Telling the truth about and through education is a core imperative of recent TCs around the world, most prominently, the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the Residential school system. As we've discussed elsewhere, the education sector has an important role to play in carrying the findings of truth-telling processes into schools, classrooms, and communities (Keynes et al. 2021). However, research shows that TCs largely frame education as institutions to be acted upon (and changed), as objects for reform, rather than as key partners with whom to work. Very few TCs formally engage education actors in the process, and fewer still engage children and young people in their work. Temporally, education is typically positioned as a secondary phase, something to follow the main transformative work of the TC and as a vehicle for disseminating the

TC's findings. However, little thought has been given to the practical implementation of TC recommendations within existing education systems, which often are complicit in the historical and structural injustices being investigated by the TC. A paradox emerges, therefore, where education systems, as well as educational institutions and actors, are often tasked with resolving injustices of their own making.

1.3. The Northern Nordics—Historical Background

The geographic area of the Indigenous Sami stretches over major parts of Scandinavia and the Kola Peninsula. This area is traditionally also populated by other groups that today hold minority status (e.g., Kvens, Finns, Tornedalians), with different cultures, livelihoods, and languages than those of the Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, and Russian majority populations (Hermanstrand et al. 2019; Olsson et al. 2016; Elenius and Vakhtin 2016). More than ten languages/language varieties are spoken in the area, of which several today are acknowledged as official minority languages in the respective nations. This means that they have extended legal protection and support to be used in schools and in public contexts, even if this does not always work as intended (e.g., Lainio 2021). Thus, what is important to recognize is that the Northern Nordic context, although similar in many respects, is a multifaceted geographical, cultural, educational, and political entity.

Historically, this area is characterized by close cultural relations and contacts among minorities stretching across present-day borders. Increased colonization started in the early modern period, especially during the first half of the seventeenth century. This was prompted by the visions of geographical expansion of the then consolidating dynastic states (Sweden/Finland, Denmark/Norway, and Russia), which soon came to include ambitions to incorporate the northern areas within their realms. Unification in religion, taxation, and the presence of natural resources have been identified as driving forces (Fur 2016; Lindmark 2016). Mission, education, and, at times, forceful Christianising campaigns led by the Lutheran state churches became a central part of Sami-state-relations during the eighteenth century (Norlin and Sjögren 2016; Kortekangas et al. 2019). This was a period when the first boarding school form for the Sami was founded and when missionaries and priests worked actively to ban many Sami religious and cultural expressions (e.g., Kuhmunen 2016; Marainen 2016; Stoor 2016). Settlement and colonization would accelerate further in the early and mid-nineteenth centuries, leading to new conditions for all these minorities. For the Sami, it meant enforcing legislation to regulate land use in relation to reindeer husbandry, farming, and forestry (Mörkenstam 1999; Lantto and Mörkenstam 2008; Lantto 2012). Together with the consolidation of the nation states—Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia—in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this came to change even more radically. Due to the closing of borders and forced displacement, the northern minorities came to be parts of different states and different nationalizing campaigns, and with this, also of different school systems and school policies (Elenius 2006; Kortekangas et al. 2019).

For the minorities and the Indigenous Sami, becoming incorporated in Nordic nation-building and modernization efforts thus meant entering school systems poorly equipped to handle other languages and cultures than those of the majority populations. Instead, it meant becoming subjected to Norwegianization, Swedification, and Finlandisation movements, which worked actively and effectively to use schooling to standardise language and cultures in line with national ideals. For all minorities, this pressed towards language change, neglect of their own cultures and epistemologies, and so on. This is accompanied by the formation of societal structures that, in many different areas, are perceived to have impacted these groups negatively.

Truth-Seeking and Reconciliation in the Northern Nordics

Truth and reconciliation processes in Norway, Sweden, and Finland have been proceeding against the backdrop sketched above over the past decade. Rather than dealing with the aftermath of war or violent conflict like in some other contexts globally (e.g.,

Hayner 2002), they seek knowledge about how the powerful role and actions of state churches (Lindmark and Sundström 2016) and states (Sannhet of forsoning 2023; Johnsen 2021; Juuso 2018; Som om vi aldrig funnits—exkludering och assimilering av tornedalningar, kväner och lantalaiset, Regeringskansliet 2023) have come to impact the Indigenous Sami and other minorities. While the Norwegian TC has published an extensive report (2023), also including Kvens/Norwegian Finns, the Swedish TC on the Sami is currently on its way to producing a first edited academic volume. The Finnish Commission started more recently and is still in the early phase (Finnish Government 2021, 2023). In addition to these, there is also a TC concerning the minority groups in the border area between Finland and Sweden, Tornedalians, Kvens, and Lantalaiset (Regeringskansliet 2023). A forerunner to these TCs was a white paper project on the historical relations between the Swedish state church and the Sami, completed with a scholarly anthology and popular publications in the years 2016 to 2018 (e.g., Lindmark and Sundström 2016; Huuva and Blind 2016). The white paper has rendered reconciliation activities such as public apologies, assisting the repatriation of Sami human remains (collected by scientists in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth), and working to include and strengthen knowledge about Sami traditional religion in church practice. Like in the Australian context, the TCs have the character of public investigations with the power to inform policy and lawmakers and make suggestions on ways to move forward.

2. Results

2.1. Indigenous Knowledges and Learners: Teacher and Curriculum Standards in Australia

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are part of both the national curriculum and the mandatory professional standards for teachers and have been embedded in TE programs across the country accordingly. Since 2014, teachers have been formally required to ‘possess knowledge regarding, understanding of, and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures’ (Patrick and Moodie 2016). Teachers must demonstrate their competency in Standard 1.4 ‘Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ and Standard 2.4 ‘Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians’. The inaugural national curriculum was released in 2010 and is a framework intended to guide the development of curriculum standards across the Australian federation. The chief policy mechanism for the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, which are the cross-curriculum priority (CCP). The CCP embeds ‘Indigenous content’ across all subject areas in the national curriculum and is one of three other CCPs together with ‘Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia’ and ‘Sustainability’. A 2022 reform has seen content related to Australian history revised to focus on ‘truth-telling’ within the broader history of Australia, a change that signals the growing influence of truth-telling processes and discourse (Keynes 2024).

2.2. Minority Knowledge, National Curricula, and Compulsory Schooling in the Nordics

Because of strengthened legislation and revision of curricula during recent decades, today, teachers in Swedish, Norwegian, and Finnish compulsory schools are required to teach about the Sami and also about other minorities. This has been accompanied by local efforts to develop more inclusive ways of teaching and embracing knowledge connected to minority languages, pedagogies, and cultures (e.g., Olsen and Sollid 2022; Keskitalo and Olsen 2019). Unlike Australia, there is no central policy that calls for the embedding of minority or Indigenous-related knowledge across the curricula in any of the Nordic countries.

The role of TE in supporting teaching about the Sami is still poorly researched in the Nordic context. A recent study on the Swedish side has highlighted the lack of preparation from TE programs that practicing teachers experience when it comes to teaching about Sami-related themes (Drugge and Norlin 2023). In turn, research on the Finnish side on

Sami-related themes in a set of Finnish TE curricula has stressed that, although there are indeed local signs of teacher educators working with Sami-related themes, there is still a central knowledge gap in the curricula that guides the programs (Mattila et al. 2023). Additionally, research projects on Indigenous pedagogy in TE and related publications linking TE to school practice are currently on their way in the Nordic context (e.g., Keskitalo et al., forthcoming).

2.3. Nordic and Australian Truth and Reconciliation Commissions: Objectives, Focus, and Educational Ambitions

The Norwegian Truth Commission to Investigate the Norwegianization Policy and Injustice against the Sámi and Kvens/Norwegian Finns was established in June 2018. A third minority group was added to the commission in (2019), namely the Forest Finns, upon their own request. The commission became known as the Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC mandate was tasked to focus on three general aims. Firstly, to scrutinize and describe Norwegian politics and actions in relation to the Sami and Kven/Norwegian Finns in a local, regional, and national context from about the year 1800 up until today. In the mandate, the role of the educational system is explicitly mentioned as an area to be assessed. Secondly, the current effects of the Norwegianization policy were another area in focus, particularly its effects in relation to language, culture, health, and identity at both collective and individual levels. Thirdly, the Norwegian TRC was tasked with presenting recommendations for actions with the aim of improving the relations between minority and majority groups (Skaar 2023, Sannhet og forsoning (final TRC report, Norway, 2023)). The TRC in Norway consisted of 12 members, including the head of commission. They were appointed by The Presidency of the Norwegian Parliament after hearings with the Sami Parliament and Kven and Sami interest organizations. The TRC in Norway completed its task and handed over the commission report in June 2023.

The Swedish government decided to establish a Truth Commission for the Sami people in November 2021, in dialogue with the Swedish Sami parliament (Regeringen 2021). The commission was tasked to focus on three specific areas. Firstly, the policies towards the Sami and the actions of relevant actors in implementing those policies should be mapped and examined. Secondly, spreading knowledge about and increasing public understanding of Sami history and how historical injustices affect the conditions of the Sami today. Thirdly, proposing measures that contribute to redress and promote reconciliation and a sustainable Sami society (Regeringen 2021). The commission was given a broad mandate, including deciding on the specific areas to be examined and how the practical work of the commission should be organized. Based on what the members considered to be of particular importance for the part of the commission's mandate aimed at increasing knowledge and public understanding of Sami history and how historical injustices affect the conditions of the Sami people today, four main focus areas were selected. These areas were related to the use of land and water, forced relocations of Sami communities, reindeer husbandry rights, and political reforms affecting language and culture (Kulturdepartementet 2023). The Swedish commission for the Sami people consists of thirteen members, including the head of commission, all of which were appointed by the Minister of Culture in close dialogue with the Sami Parliament. The commission is currently ongoing and expected to report its work in December 2025.

In Finland, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Concerning the Sámi People was appointed by the Finnish government in October 2021, in close cooperation between the Finnish state, the Finnish Sámi Parliament, and the Skolt Sámi Siida Council. The commission was given a broad mandate that explicitly pointed out the freedom to choose its organization and activities. Four main tasks were set out for the commission to consider. Firstly, to identify and assess historical and current discrimination and violations of rights. Secondly, to map and discover how historical injustices affect Sami communities in present times. A third task was to create links between the Sami and the state of Finland, and a fourth task was to raise awareness about the Indigenous Sami people

in Finnish society. There was also a general aim to ensure the truth and reconciliation process leads to the Finnish state taking responsibility for its previous actions and seeking to strengthen the rights of the Sami people in Finland. The Finnish TRC consists of five members, two of them proposed by the government, two elected by the Sami Parliament, and one proposed by the Skolt Sami Siida Council (Finnish government, <https://vnk.fi/en/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-concerning-the-sami-people> (accessed on 20 March 2024); Szpak and Bunikowski 2022). The TRC in Finland is ongoing and expected to report its work in December 2025.

In 2021, the Swedish government appointed a Truth Commission for the Tornedalians, Kvens, and Lantalaïset (Sveriges Riksdag 2020). The mandate was broad and extensive, consisting of a number of specified areas. Firstly, the commission was tasked to map and review the assimilation policy against Tornedalians, Kven, and Lantalaïset at national, regional, and local levels with a focus on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Secondly, the commission was prompted to invite individuals to give testimonies, particularly young people. Thirdly, the focus should be on analyzing the extent and reasons for race biology research. Fourthly, other historical aspects that might have negatively affected the situation for the Tornedalian, Kvens, and Lantalaïset should be scrutinized. Lastly, the commission was tasked to analyze the consequences for the minority group, minorities within the group, and individuals, with a specific focus on perspectives from the younger generation. A general aim was also to spread information and knowledge about the groups in focus to the general public and to hand over recommendations and suggestions on how to move forward after the completion of the commission. Eight members were appointed to the commission by the Minister of Culture. The commission reported its work in November 2023 (Regeringskansliet 2023).

The Yoorrook Justice Commission (YRJC) is the first formal truth-telling process into historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria, Australia. Legally speaking, it is a Royal Commission with all the requisite powers and formalities.¹ The scope of the investigation is significantly longer than other previous inquiries, extending from colonization to the present day (more than 200 years). Its subject matter is also broad, covering all historical and ongoing injustices perpetrated by state and non-state entities against First Peoples since colonization. It aims to (a) establish an official record of the impact of colonization on First Peoples in Victoria, (b) develop a shared understanding among all Victorians of the impact of colonization, as well as the diversity, strength, and resilience of First Peoples' cultures, and (c) make recommendations for healing, system reform and practical changes to laws, policy, and education, as well as to matters to be included in future treaties (Yoorrook Justice Commission 2021). In order to address such a broad mandate, the commission carried out extensive Elder yarning circles and *wurrek tyerrang* (hearings) during 2022 and subsequently identified the following priority areas: Child Protection and Criminal Justice, Land Sky and Waters, Health Education and Housing, Economic Prosperity. Five commissioners were originally appointed in June 2021 following an Expression of Interest process and assessment by an independent panel. The selection criteria, determined by the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and the Victorian Government, required a majority of commissioners to be Aboriginal and at least two to be Victorian Traditional Owners. At the time of writing, in March 2024, only three of the original five were still in their positions, with two replacement commissioners appointed in February 2023 and January 2024, respectively. The commission's methodology is described as weaving 'Western methodological rigor into the methodological foundation of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing' (Yoorrook Justice Commission 2023). Education is both a focus of the TC's inquiry into injustices, as well as a domain identified as a target of recommendations for reform. For example, the 2021 'Tyerri Yoorrook (Seed of Truth)' report called for the "overhauling of history education" and the creation of a "new public narrative" in Victoria.

3. Discussion—Implications for Future Teacher Training?

Public education and education reform are aspirations of both the Victorian and the Nordic TCs. The findings and recommendations of TCs in these contexts will likely have implications both for future schooling and future teacher training. This might include new requirements on institutional responsiveness and adaptation in relation to the new knowledge acquired as well as an adjustment of such knowledge to various pedagogical practices in the respective geographical contexts. In what follows, we discuss possible implications for teacher training on three levels: systemic, institutional, and practical, including potential barriers and opportunities. Comparing the different contexts here can offer a foundation for more specific research and professional dialogue on how TE might respond to TC processes and their associated implications at each level.

3.1. Systemic Level

At the national level in Australia, there are already two systemic instruments that shape teacher education regarding Indigenous students and knowledges: teacher professional standards and national curriculum. As outlined above, teacher standards mandate demonstrated competency in teaching Indigenous students *and* Indigenous content. In addition, the national curriculum mandates Indigenous content across *all* levels and subjects via the cross-curriculum priority (CCP). Therefore, teacher education programs must prepare pre-service teachers to demonstrate these competencies and teach Indigenous knowledges in their subjects. We discuss some approaches to this at the ‘institutional’ level below.

These systemic instruments have already been in place nationally for more than ten years in Australia. How, then, can the YRJC’s educational goals be understood? One view is that systemic reforms over the past ten years have not been effective. The CCP and professional standards are based on the premise that knowing more about Indigenous cultures and histories would result in a shift in majority views. This has not come to fruition, evidenced, for example, by the recent defeat of the ‘Voice’ referendum and high levels of racism directed at Indigenous people during the debate. In addition, systemic reforms have had little effect on improving the learning experiences of Indigenous students (Gillan et al. 2017; Vass et al. 2019). Schools still disproportionately exclude Indigenous children, who continue to experience high rates of educational disadvantage. The Victorian TC has ambitious educational goals because systemic instruments at the national policy level have ultimately not been effective at reducing racism and improving the educational experiences of Indigenous students.

For more than a decade in the Nordic context, there has been both legislation and curriculum supporting the inclusion of Sami-related themes in schools in various subject areas (e.g., Svonni and Spjut 2023; Somby and Olsen 2022; Spjut 2021), although quite meager in relation to the overall ambitions of policy directed towards Indigenous peoples (Svonni 2015). However, today, there are no systemic instruments that place demands on how to teach such topics, let alone how TE shall support such parts of the profession. In addition, there has been inconsistency, or misalignment, in different levels of national curricula, making it potentially hard for teachers to interpret how to work with such steering documents (Spjut 2020) as well as a lack of updated teaching material (Drugge and Norlin 2023). Furthermore, the focus tends to be more on teachers learning how to teach about topics relating to Sami or other minorities rather than to support Indigenous students per se (like in Australia). As mentioned, there are no requirements for embedding Indigenous-related knowledge across the curricula like the CCP.

Furthermore, it is also vital to recognize that the TE landscape in the northern Nordics is by no means uniform. Legislation, curricula, and impact of policy affect the overall organization of teacher training differently in the three nations. This includes the length of teacher training programs, their mandatory content, and the age level and school subject(s) knowledge in which knowledge about minorities and Indigenous peoples is prescribed. It also includes the legal prospect of localizing national curricula. For example, TE programs

for compulsory school teachers in Norway, Finland, and Sweden have different lengths. In Finland, where such programs include master level, more space is available for teaching content (also of optional sort; see examples below). This can be seen as creating barriers when it comes to cross-national cooperation and exchange within teaching in the focused area, which might be viewed as specifically important when it comes to Indigenous people living across national borders. Moreover, on a systemic level, Norway has, for instance, come further with a reframing policy to include Sami-related knowledge in HE and TE, although much work is still to be conducted regarding actual implementation (Somby and Olsen 2022).

3.2. Institutional Level

In response to the systemic requirements outlined in the previous section, TE providers in Australia have mandated Indigenous Studies as a subject in their TE programs (Thorpe and Burgess 2016). In 2022, AITSL affirmed this approach when it recommended that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content should be included as a mandatory unit of study or indeed, mandatory cross-curricula focus, within ITE programs” (AITSL 2022, p. 6). More broadly, tertiary institutions in Australia have embedded Indigenous knowledge ‘graduate attributes’ across their course offerings (Page et al. 2019). Therefore, today, pre-service teachers in Australian universities are assessed on their abilities to deliver content about Indigenous peoples and to support Indigenous students’ learning. There is now a large body of research scrutinizing the impact of these. Researchers have found that pre-service teachers exhibit fear, hesitation, and resistance in these subjects (Rogers 2018), lack prior knowledge, and struggle to accept and learn concepts of white privilege, race, and racism (Rom 2023), that TE instructors’ attitudes and beliefs influence how Indigenous content is taught (Thorpe and Burgess 2016), and in some cases, that TE instructors demonstrate a lack of responsibility for implementing change (Hogarth 2022).

Another influence on TE in Australia is the cycle of media scrutiny and the undermining of the teaching profession. This is one factor contributing to the current severe teacher shortage. After yet another government inquiry into TE in 2023, Jenny Gore (2023) explained:

It continues a decades-long focus on external regulation and mandated content while disregarding the expertise of teacher educators. It also fails to address the structural and systemic issues—such as inequitable resourcing of schools, excessive administrative burden on teachers, and devaluing of the profession—which have led to teacher shortages and falling standards.

A large body of research attests to the deterioration of teachers’ working conditions over the past two decades, including increasing workload (Creagh et al. 2023), particularly administration (Fitzgerald et al. 2019), stagnant salaries, ‘deskilling’ (Stacey et al. 2024) constant media criticism (Gore and Mockler 2022) leading to declining morale. Unprecedented numbers of qualified teachers are leaving the profession (New South Wales Teachers Federation 2023). TE programs have also been a major target of politicians and media commentators who have criticized so-called ‘woke’ ideologies at the expense of teaching core literacy and numeracy skills (Institute of Public Affairs 2023). These spurious critiques are part of a broader culture war over the nation’s colonial history and its ongoing impact.

There are numerous possible implications of the Victorian TC process for TE programs in Victoria. This includes barriers to the implementation of new knowledge and/or expectations for teachers in TE programs. There is already limited space in TE programs, and any potential reforms would take place within a discourse dominated by media criticism, culture wars, and cycles of ineffective government policy. That said, local institutional cultures may well drive place-based reforms. For instance, the University of Melbourne has been undertaking its own University truth-telling project and is also home to the nationally significant Ngarrngga curriculum project, which together may create institutional conditions to support meaningful reform in TE programs that align with the YRJC’s aims.

In the Nordic context, it is important to recognize that not only do the national legislative frameworks on how TE shall be organized differ in each respective nation, but local institutions also have their own preconditions for how teacher training can be organized. Accordingly, the knowledge and recommendations generated by TCs will likely be absorbed differently by different TE institutions. This could depend on the actual length of teacher training programs (and how this allows the introduction of new knowledge), but also that teaching cultures and the agency of individual teacher educators can differ between local universities. For example, in some northern Swedish universities, TE is to be dispersed over a multitude of departments, disciplines, and subject areas, creating fragmentation. Secondly, it is quite top-governed and, therefore, hard to change. Other TEs could be organized in smaller units with more cohesive programs, likely more suitable to support the professional autonomy of individual teacher educators, which, in turn, can allow more freedom to include new knowledge and work practices. Recent examples from northern Finland show that it is actually possible for individual TE educators to create new courses on Sami-related themes (Mattila et al. 2023). This, however, is at the master's level and is, therefore, not applicable for TE in Sweden, for instance. The professional autonomy of TE educators thus seems like a central factor.

Basically, (too) rigid and hard-to-change systems and institutional practices can be seen as central framing factors and obstacles, along with coherent steering documents and the lack of updated and initiated teaching materials both in TE and at the school level. Even though the quality of teacher training and the status of the teacher profession, in general, is continuously debated in academic contexts, as well as in professional and public media, there is not (yet) any apparent connection to the wokeism debate of this area as in Australia.

3.3. Practical Level

What possible implications might the TCs have for TE at a practical level? We are referring to implications for pedagogy, knowledge, materials, and for teachers' and students' own personal beliefs and attitudes. While TCs tend to recommend changes to policy and curriculum, those changes largely depend on teachers implementing them. Research consistently shows that teacher beliefs and attitudes play a major role in policy interpretation and implementation. We know from a considerable body of research on divided societies that educational policy reforms designed to address division do not foster social change unless teachers support the policy and are trained and supported to implement it (McCully 2012). In many cases, teachers act as gatekeepers and can hinder policies designed to address division or teach difficult or controversial topics (McCully 2019; Tuck and Yang 2012). For ongoing TC processes in both Australia and the northern Nordics, this means that TCs must not only focus on policy-level changes to be successful long-term but should also support teachers to implement systemic change, including dedicated professional learning that engages with their existing attitudes and beliefs and the impact of these on social transformation (Bellino et al. 2017).

This is related to another practical challenge: the importance of teachers improving their own cultural understanding, including understanding their own attitudes, stereotypes, beliefs, and behaviors (Rogers 2018). Opportunities for this arise in TE, but developing self-reflexivity should be an ongoing process of teacher professional learning and identity formation. Indigenous Studies teaches that engaging with Indigenous perspectives necessarily entails an acknowledgment of how they are entwined with forms of colonization and injustice (Tuhiwai Smith 2021). This includes core principles of positionality—the power inherent in one's immediate respective social position—and intersectionality—how people may experience overlapping forms of discrimination or disadvantage based on intersectional attributes such as gender, class, age, etc. In the Australian context, learning more about Indigenous perspectives necessarily entails self-reflection and reflexivity, including ongoing reflection on teachers' own intersectional positionality within broader socio-historical structures. This includes, for example, their position in an education system that has been aimed at assimilation and which continues to disproportionately exclude

Indigenous students. Perhaps there is a lesson for the Nordic context from Australia: rather than simply aiming to ‘know more’ *about* minority cultures and histories, TC processes must also direct majority cultures to learn and reflect on their own cultures, including how individual teachers are positioned within differentiated power relations and structures.

A final practical challenge concerns teachers’ selection of knowledge and pedagogy. Research shows that teachers often avoid difficult topics, and it is these topics that are likely to be generated through TC processes (Teeger 2015). While TCs might recommend the inclusion of specific knowledge in TE and school education, teachers in Australia at least still have a degree of autonomy to select the knowledge they include in their lessons, as well as the ways they might teach it. Research shows that pedagogical approaches to teaching Indigenous knowledge, for example, in the school subject of history, are dominated by Western ways of knowing and thinking (Keynes 2021; Smith 2020; Harrison 2013). Yet research also shows that including Indigenous perspectives in teaching requires engaging with Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge that go beyond representational content and towards relational ontologies (Fredericks 2007). These pedagogical approaches are important for supporting Indigenous learners to thrive and unsettling Western deficit-based frameworks.

When it comes to the possible pedagogical impact of TCs in the Nordic setting, such could be understood in relation to different levels of education (both TE and compulsory schooling) and central didactical questions. First, concerning schooling, this directly relates to questions about what actual knowledge about Indigenous people and minorities should be taught in schools, in which forms this should happen, at which age level of schooling, within which subject area, and in relation to what aims? This is, of course, related to barriers and opportunities on both the systemic and institutional levels. How, for instance, can the separate national narratives produced by the TCs become more transnationally applicable? How do we respond to the pluralism of epistemologies and ontologies relating to Indigenous and minority pedagogy (e.g., Outakoski 2021; Gullberg and Björkgren 2021, *passim*)? How can we make use of the potential of this expanding field and how can we blend it with already existing knowledge and pedagogical practices? Is, for instance, multi-perspectivism a viable way to move forward?

Second, regarding teacher education—how to teach future and already practicing teachers to teach school children about this? What competencies and didactical skills do they need? What forms of ethics and cultural sensitivity are required to be taught? What, in the Nordic context, might be considered controversial topics (Drugge and Norlin 2023; Larsson and Larsson 2021) and/or contested pasts (unlikely to ever be treated with consensus? And what other formats of education need to be activated? A potential resource for meeting these new demands in the Nordic as well as in the Australian context is to make better use of PD activities to support practicing teachers’ pedagogical ability to teach about Indigenous and minority cultures, knowledge, and histories. This includes both structures already in place at many universities in Sweden, including workshops at annual PD weeks as well as PD in the area offered by national and regional public institutions (e.g., The Living History Forum). Initiatives from the Canadian context have also provided fruitful examples of book clubs and reading circles that could work as valuable means to prepare teacher students for work in this area locally (Anuik 2021).

Third, intertwined with the didactical questions above is education research, i.e., what research is needed to support this development, and do we need to find additional means to rethink and improve how TE is organised around these issues? How can educational researchers respond to the knowledge produced, critically discuss it, and work towards a pedagogization and didactization of it? One obstacle to such a response is that we still know very little about what is going on in this area in the northern Nordics, i.e., the scope, content, and efficacy of activities, such as PD. Addressing this problem requires a more comprehensive mapping of TE and PD activities, the goal of which is to establish the groundwork for future in-depth studies on what such activities entail and how they aim to support the teaching of Indigenous and minority knowledge. Drawing on other cases of

TRCs globally, a lesson to be learned is that an active dialogue between TCs and education needs to accompany their work (Paulson and Bellino 2021).

4. Conclusions

This paper has brought together knowledge from two geographical contexts, Australia and the northern Nordics, in the area of ongoing TCs, their call for new knowledge, and their possible implications for teacher training. Structuring such knowledge at systemic, institutional, and practical levels in relation to TE has clarified both the differences and similarities between the two. On a systemic level, it is apparent that instruments to work with integrating knowledge relating to Indigenous peoples in TE, in a way, are in place in both contexts, but that such instruments are much stronger in the Australian setting (e.g., teacher professional standards), but are not necessarily effective. It is also evident that institutional differences in how TE is organized in the two contexts—as well as among the three Nordic countries—affect how local institutions might be able to work with Indigenous themes in TE (e.g., length and fragmentation of teacher programs). On a practical level, similar questions relating to teacher educators' attitudes and agency, their (lack of) knowledge in the area, and the inadequate support from steering documents seem to be common factors. It is also apparent that similar didactical challenges (e.g., selection of knowledge, how to teach it, in relation to what subject area and to whom it should be taught) surface in both contexts. Barriers across all levels include overcrowded curricula, low professional autonomy, the status of teacher educators, and the potential controversy that can be attached to teaching about Indigenous themes. Opportunities comprise the prospects of cross-national cooperation and new impulses to pedagogical practice.

Finally, we acknowledge that the paper is dealing with a topic that is currently in the making and, therefore, also in flux. What perhaps stands out most in both geographical contexts is the need for advanced research as well as a strengthened professional dialogue in this area in order for TE to be able to better respond to the new requirements of TCs, but also for TCs to better respond to various needs of TE. Our hope is that the paper has worked to support such future research and professional dialogue.

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Note

¹ <https://yoorrookjusticecommission.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Yoorrook-Justice-Commission-Interim-Report.pdf> (accessed on 20 March 2024). It has been ongoing since 2020 and is set to conclude in 2025. Reckoning with past injustice is an integral part of the treaty process, to which the Victorian government has been committed since 2018. According to the government, 'truth-telling lays the foundation for treaty with a shared understanding and creation of public record' (Victorian Government 2024). The truth commission was established after the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria (Assembly) passed a resolution in June 2020 seeking commitment from the State to establish a truth and justice process.

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