Listen to Our Voices: Policy Insights for Strengthening Education with Indigenous Education

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Acknowledgements

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Dr. Jennifer S. Dockstator, NCCIE National Project Director.

This paper is based on the many insights, observations, and words of wisdom shared by people across the country who are involved in Indigenous education and who have been participants and collaborators with the National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education (NCCIE). Special gratitude is extended to the NCCIE Regional Leads, NCCIE Research Associates, Elders, Knowledge Holders, and community members who have contributed to the content of this report.

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Executive Summary

In 2017, First Nations University of Canada (FNUniv) founded the National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education (NCCIE), a four-year project aimed at amplifying community voices and strengthening Indigenous education across Canada. The project resulted in the widely accessible website, www.nccie.ca, where anyone interested in Indigenous education can discover stories about Indigenous education initiatives as well as freely available teaching resources that have been created with an Indigenous lens. The main objective of this report is to give voice to NCCIE's myriad contributors, detailing what we have learned about Indigenous education and presenting a set of policy recommendations aimed at strengthening education for all learners, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, through Indigenous education. As well, it reflects upon the 1972 policy paper, *Indian Control of Indian Education,* as another step along the journey of Indigenous control of Indigenous education.

The report first sheds light on how Indigenous Peoples and educators (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) understand what Indigenous education is, laying a common foundation for appreciating all of the recommendations that ensue. It is not possible to encapsulate all that Indigenous education is with a one-sentence definition. Rather, a set of principles is presented as parts of one whole, rather than as separate, discrete elements. These principles are interconnected and intertwine with each other. Understanding all that Indigenous education is requires appreciating each of these principles and embracing them as one narrative:

- *Indigenous education is for everyone, not just Indigenous Peoples*
- *Indigenous education is lifelong*
- *Indigenous education places the student at the centre of learning*
- *Indigenous education involves "all our relations"*
- *Indigenous education is holistic*
- *Indigenous education, today, takes place on-the-land, in communities, and in schools*
- *Indigenous education teaches what it is to be human*

The first two recommendations support these principles and underscore key declarations that underpin the remainder of the report:

> ***Recommendation 1:*** *Be mindful of the diversity amongst Indigenous Peoples. Policy solutions need to take into account unique circumstances; they cannot be one-size-fits-all.*
>
> ***Recommendation 2:*** *Be holistic and systems-thinking when making changes to policy and curricula for strengthening Indigenous education and its support networks, while respecting Recommendation #1, resisting one-size-fits-all approaches.*

The second set of recommendations relate to the many relationships that need to be healthy and strong for students' well-being and educational success:

> ***Recommendation 3:*** *Foster opportunities to build and strengthen relationships with and increase involvement of Indigenous Peoples in the fabric of one's school.*
>
> ***Recommendation 4:*** *Increase opportunities for students to connect with the land and learn from the land.*

Recommendation 5: *Increase opportunities, resources, and funding for students to connect with, reclaim, and learn Indigenous languages so that ties to the land are reinforced and the knowledge held within is not lost.*

Recommendation 6: *"Nothing about us without us"*

The third set of recommendations relate to strengthening the variety of supports for students and educators alike:

Recommendation 7: *Increase equitability in core funding for Indigenous education; increase accountability and transparency; increase internet bandwidth and speeds*

Recommendation 8: *Recognize Elders and Knowledge Holders as instructors equal to certified teachers. Strengthen community-based involvement of Elders and Knowledge Holders in leading and teaching Indigenous ways of knowing in school subjects and activities.*

Recommendation 9: *Offer professional development to address issues and advance the hard work of reconciliation through education.*

Recommendation 10: *Recognize the important role of Indigenous support workers in schools.*

Recommendation 11: *Address systemic racism with Indigenous education.*

Recommendation 12: *Strong foundations are needed for educators to become comfortable when teaching Indigenous content with an Indigenous lens. Pre-service and in-service teacher training in Indigenous education is consequentially important.*

The final set of recommendations, taken together with all preceding recommendations, offer a vision for transforming education and strengthening Indigenous education from an Indigenous perspective. All of the recommendations taken together aim to evolve education practice in mainstream settings – to enhance classroom and on-the-land learning, rebalancing Western educational systems with due respect for Indigenous education to enrich learning for all:

Recommendation 13: *Expand Indigenous control of Indigenous education*

Recommendation 14: *Support traditional ways of child-rearing in education practice.*

Recommendation 15: *Every Indigenous child and family should have access to Indigenous-led, culturally-specific early childhood education programs.*

Recommendation 16: *Transform education, educational spaces, and classroom experiences to provide an education that "teaches what it is to be a human," dedicating time and space for all students to learn from Indigenous ways of knowing and being.*

Recommendation 17: *Support land-based programs with ongoing access to language and culture, including tailoring them for younger children.*

Recommendation 18: *Strengthen opportunities to become "code switchers" – those who can walk in both worlds – Indigenous and Western – in culturally good ways.*

Recommendation 19: *Search for and digitize recordings of Elders and Knowledge Holders that remain in analog form so that the knowledge shared remains available for future generations.*

Recommendation 20: *Revisiting Recommendation #1: Be mindful of the diversity among Indigenous Peoples.*

The recommendations in this report present important changes for strengthening Indigenous education and transforming education in general, rebalancing the education students receive to give due respect to Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Indigenous education, when approached holistically, is for everyone's benefit. Standing on the shoulders of the 1972 policy paper, "Indian Control of Indian Education," this NCCIE report is another step along the journey toward Indigenous control of Indigenous education. The recommendations in this report present a blueprint for transforming education for the benefit of Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous educators and learners of all ages. Braiding all of these recommendations together, the contributors to this report envision a future where Indigenous education is equal to Western education, where both approaches to learning combine powerfully to yield a new generation of citizens with mutual respect for one another and who appreciate the wisdom of more than one way of knowing and being in this world.

Listen to Our Voices: Policy Insights toward Strengthening Education with Indigenous Education[1]

Preface

"I wish I remembered the Elder's name . . . He said, 'To have a vision, you close your eyes so you can see further.' It tells you a lot, you know. Stop; think; you know."

Verna J. Kirkness, Associate Professor Emeritus, University of British Columbia

A teaching heard numerous times over the years that was shared by more than one Elder in various settings – in ceremonies, Elders Gatherings, meetings, and visits – simply states, "You have two ears and one mouth for a reason." While a simple statement on the surface, it has profound meaning, which is to say: it is often more worthwhile to listen than to speak. Taken together with Elder Verna Kirkness' observation, when you close your eyes (and mouth) and open your ears and heart to listen – both to your inner self as well as to what others are saying – you can learn so much. The spirit and intention of these words have guided the work of the National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education (NCCIE) since its inception.

With this approach to its work – listening to many voices during the course of the four-year project – NCCIE has produced a wealth of resources that are available on a website for anyone interested in learning about Indigenous education and all that it encompasses (www.nccie.ca). The collaborations and relationships that NCCIE has forged and broadened with Indigenous partners have generated many conversations, yielding rich insights about Indigenous education. This paper highlights these learnings to inform policy for strengthening education for all with the gifts Indigenous education has to offer, benefiting Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and learners of all ages.

At the outset, it is important to place the work of NCCIE and the recommendations in this report in context relative to the 1972 policy paper, "Indian Control of Indian Education," which details the vision of Indigenous Peoples in Canada to "reclaim our right to direct the education of our children."[2] The stories on the NCCIE website provide a snapshot at a moment in time along this journey toward Indigenous control of Indigenous education. They reveal the strength and diversity in Indigenous education that has grown over decades despite inequitable funding and insufficient resources.

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[1] This work is the compilation of wisdom and insights gathered from Elders, Knowledge Holders, NCCIE Regional Leads, NCCIE Research Associates, and members of Indigenous communities who have partnered with NCCIE during the four-year project. The author, Dr. Dockstator, acknowledges with deep gratitude all who contributed their time and input toward the resulting policy and curricular recommendations found herein. For a list of participants, please see Appendix A.

[2] Retrieved December 15, 2021 from: https://oneca.com/IndianControlofIndianEducation.pdf; page 3.

This NCCIE report shines a light on the next steps needed along this journey to continue forward progress so that the goals and principles detailed in the 1972 paper are realized, among them: ". . . to give our children the knowledge to understand and be proud of themselves and the knowledge to understand the world around them;"[3] " . . . that Canadian children of every racial origin have the opportunity during their school days to learn about the history, customs and culture of this country's original inhabitants and first citizens;"[4] that "school curricula in federal and provincial/territorial schools should recognize Indian culture, values, customs, languages and the Indian contribution to Canadian development;"[5] and "courses in Indian history and culture should promote pride in the Indian child, and respect in the non-Indian student."[6]

These aspirations stand to this day. NCCIE.CA highlights many educational initiatives where educators, schools, and communities alike have acted upon this vision. Yet, more work remains to be done. Indigenous Peoples continue to press for equitable funding as well as for fundamental changes in Canada's education systems for the benefit of their children, first and foremost, but that will benefit all Canadians in this age of reconciliation. It is noteworthy that many of the recommendations set forth in this report echo statements made in the 1972 policy paper. Where relevant, these synchronicities are pointed out in the ensuing pages. At its essence, NCCIE represents a moment along the journey toward Indigenous control of Indigenous education, and this report highlights the future steps along this journey. While strides have been made, much work remains.

Introduction

In 2017, First Nations University of Canada (FNUniv) founded the National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education (NCCIE), a four-year project aimed at amplifying community voices and strengthening Indigenous education across Canada. The Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies at Trent University partnered with FNUniv to advance the 'action research' of the project, the result of which is the widely accessible website, www.nccie.ca, where anyone interested in Indigenous education can discover stories about Indigenous education initiatives as well as freely available teaching resources that have been created with an Indigenous lens.
The purpose of this paper is two-fold:

1) To provide a brief overview of the NCCIE project. A more in-depth discussion of the processes and protocols NCCIE followed, including strengths of the project and challenges that were encountered, is shared in the accompanying report, *A "Community First" Approach to Indigenous Research*.
2) To give voice to myriad contributors, detailing what we have learned through NCCIE's many collaborations and presenting a set of policy recommendations

[3] Retrieved December 15, 2021 from: file:///C:/Users/jsdoc/Desktop/IndianControlofIndianEducation.pdf; page 1.
[4] Ibid., page 2.
[5] Ibid., page 9.
[6] Ibid., page 9.

aimed at strengthening education for all learners, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, through Indigenous education.

Before embarking on this learning journey, a moment is needed to reflect on the words "Indigenous" and "communities." The use of the word "Indigenous" is in no way intended to generalize about the distinctness and diversity of the original Peoples of Canada or the world. "Indigenous" is meant to be inclusive of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, non-status Indians and other rights holders' classifications. In addition, throughout this paper and depending on the context, "Peoples" is capitalized to respect the distinctness and nationhood of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. The word "communities" refers to Inuit, Métis, and First Nation groups – on- or off-reserve, urban, rural, or remote. Community partners collaborating with NCCIE may be individuals, schools, First Nations, or organizations.

Background

NCCIE is an Indigenous-led project under the leadership of FNUniv and Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies, with guidance and direction provided by the FNUniv Elders' Council, kêhte-ayak. Funding for NCCIE was secured through Indigenous Service Canada's New Paths for Education funding program.

From the outset, a central, organizing tenet of NCCIE has been to respect and reflect the primacy of oral traditions, allowing Indigenous Peoples to tell their stories and share their experiences in their own words. Broad-based involvement from coast-to-coast-to-coast was sought, resulting in 17 regional teams who engaged with individuals and organizations in their territories to carry out the collaborative work of the project, respecting Indigenous research principles and protocols. As a result, 17 Regional Leads and over 250 youth, students, and community members from across the country worked with Indigenous communities and organizations on the many facets of the project. These included:

- Gathering audio and video stories about First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education initiatives wherever they are found in rural, urban, and remote parts of Canada (in schools, colleges, learning centres, and universities, through Friendship Centres and other community organizations, in communities and on-the-land)
- Identifying resources and articles about Indigenous education on the worldwide web
- Pursuing projects that contribute to strengthening and reclaiming Indigenous languages
- Sharing the wisdom of Elders and Knowledge Holders through videos, playlists, and documentary films
- Developing and sharing lesson plans with an Indigenous lens
- Collaborating on a virtual guide for educators to facilitate broader understanding and use of these lesson plans
- Creating videos with community partners, and
- Hosting in-person workshops, digital forums, and national gatherings.

The information and knowledge gathered as a result of all this work is shared on the NCCIE website (in both English and French), amplifying community voices and privileging imagery over the written word with over 640 video and audio recordings that showcase the strength and diversity of Indigenous education across Canada.

While the focus of the project for the first two years was to gather 'stories' about Indigenous education, in the third year NCCIE turned to the Indigenous principle of reciprocity to organize the work of 'giving back' to communities. Regional teams turned to their community partners and asked what kinds of educational resources they would like to co-develop with the support of NCCIE resources. As a result, over 100 lesson plans and over 50 videos appear on the English and French websites combined. Figure 1 illustrates the organizing framework for NCCIE, placing communities at the centre to privilege imagery and amplify community voices, to feed communities through mutually beneficial projects, and to create opportunities for communities to connect and learn directly from each other to strengthen Indigenous education across the country.

Figure 1: Organizing Framework for NCCIE

Source: https://www.nccie.ca/about-us/indigenous-education/

Intention and Purpose

The experiences and insights from the work carried out during the four years of the NCCIE project are rich and informative. NCCIE has become a repository of knowledge and practical tools for education with the multi-faceted intention of highlighting initiatives

that connect people with land, languages, and cultures; expanding appreciation for the wisdom within Indigenous ways of knowing and being; sharing insights that both enrich student learning and support students in their learning journeys; providing educators with tools for teaching Indigenous content with respect and humility; and furthering Canada's reconciliation goals with resources that infuse Indigenous content into curricula and give voice to the country's historical truths.

Over the four years of the project, regional teams have benefited from the gift of time to develop and strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities, organizations, and individuals. As a result, NCCIE teams at both the regional and national levels have learned a great deal by listening to the project's Indigenous partners who are experts in their own rights. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to share what NCCIE has learned. These learnings, in turn, can inform policies aimed at strengthening Indigenous education to benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and learners of all ages.

Gathering Information - Methodology

In preparation for this paper, several discussions were held with NCCIE regional teams across the country.Thirteen meetings were held in all. Because of COVID-19, all were held virtually, via Zoom. 15 regional leads, 19 research associates, and 7 community members participated in these discussions, which lasted between one hour and 1.75 hours (see Appendix A). The meetings were recorded and notes were taken, all of which were reviewed extensively to glean key points, insights, and quotations.

As well, when COVID restrictions lifted to allow air travel in 2021, a face-to-face meeting was held with the Elders' Council, kêhte-ayak, at First Nations University of Canada when the Elders met for the first time since the pandemic started. During that meeting and a few follow-up Zoom conversations, their input was also gathered for this report.

In addition to these meetings, information for this paper was gleaned from notes, summary reports, and recordings of three NCCIE national gatherings and 13 regional workshops. The national gatherings were held in March 2018, August 2019, and March 2020. The national team, regional leads, student and youth researchers, community members, and Elders attended to share highlights of the project to date as well as to discuss issues pertinent to Indigenous education. Attendance at the first two in-person national gatherings numbered approximately 300 participants. Because the third national gathering was virtual due to the pandemic, attendance was greater at about 500 people. Similarly, 13 regional workshops were held over the first three years of the project at various locations around the country. Attendance ranged between 15 and 50 participants. The workshops were an opportunity for people involved in Indigenous education to gather, network, and discuss Indigenous education issues specifically relevant to their regions.

Videos that had been generated from some of these events as well as "stories" available on NCCIE.CA were two additional sources of information for this paper. These

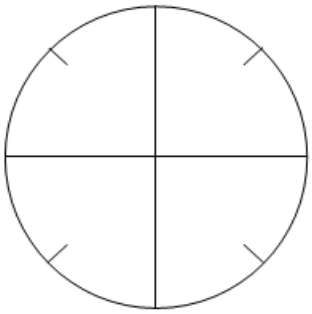
videos are available on the NCCIE website at: https://www.nccie.ca/national-gathering/ and https://www.nccie.ca/teaching-resource-centre/videos/.

Through an inductive approach to analysis, observations from all these sources have led to a coalescing of ideas. These, in turn, have contributed to the many insights and learnings that have informed the ensuing discussion, conclusions, and policy recommendations.

Organizing Framework – A Medicine Circle Approach

The format of the ensuing discussion is based on a set of teachings that are connected to a Medicine Circle (as illustrated below).[7] There are many Medicine Circles used by many Indigenous Peoples. The origins of the Medicine Circle for this paper are Nehiyawak (Plains Cree) and Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) and are grounded in Creation and learned through ceremonies with Elders.

Figure 2: A Medicine Circle



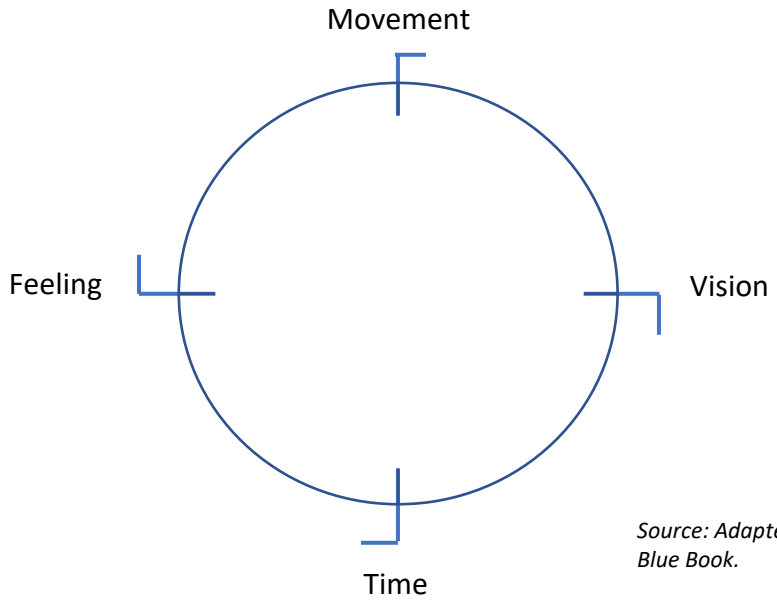
Source: Adapted from M. Thrasher (1987). Blue Book.

The final report of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) also uses the Plains Cree Medicine Circle to ground its discussion. This report (1996) acknowledges, "Although it [the Medicine Circle] is not a part of all Aboriginal traditions, it is nevertheless useful for understanding perspectives that are shared by many Aboriginal peoples" (p. 414).

One of the many teachings of this Medicine Circle is that it is a model for facilitating change. It lays out a holistic process one can follow to explore a question or issue at hand. It is a circular, iterative process grounded in the original gifts of Creation: vision, time, feeling, and movement.

[7] The name 'Medicine Circle' is used in this paper. Other names used are 'Medicine Wheel' or 'Sacred Hoop.' There are many Medicine Circles, but not all Indigenous Peoples use a Medicine Circle in their traditions. The Medicine Circle in this report is grounded in Nehiyaw (Plains Cree) and Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) cultures. For more information about the Medicine Circle, see: Dockstator, J.S. (2014). *Widening the Sweetgrass Road: Re/Balancing ways of knowing for sustainable living with a Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle* [Doctoral dissertation, York University, Toronto]. York Repository. https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/29900.

Figure 3: Four Original Gifts of Creation



Source: Adapted from M. Thrasher (1987). Blue Book.

Beginning in the east where the sun rises, light shines on a new day. With light comes the gift of vision. Some of the teachings connected to this gift relate to increasing awareness and respecting an issue by looking at it from different points of view. Imagine, as individuals, we stand at the centre of our own circles. Standing in one place, we turn around to see the world from many different angles. So, too, with the Medicine Circle. With 360 degrees in a circle and an infinitely greater number of degrees in a sphere, one can respect the many perspectives there are in the world and in the universe. Being mindful that one perspective is just that – one perspective – gives us pause to respect and balance many points of view. Extending these teachings for the purpose of this paper, the discussion will focus on shedding light and clarifying for the reader the many aspects of Indigenous education that, when combined, create a common foundation and holistic understanding of all that Indigenous education embodies.

Moving clockwise to the south, for those living on Turtle Island[8] in the northern hemisphere, we look southward to watch the sun travel its daily path, marking the passage of time as it travels across the sky from east to west. The sun and earth are deep in relationship, given that the heat and light energy from the sun are necessary for life to grow here on earth. Some of the teachings in this direction relate to the responsibilities of being in relationship with others, that is, taking the time to care for our

[8] Turtle Island is an Indigenous reference to North America. The name comes from a number of Indigenous Peoples' Creation stories and oral histories. For more information, see: https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/turtle-island#:~:text=For%20some%20Indigenous%20peoples%2C%20Turtle,the%20world%20on%20its%20back.

relationships to build and strengthen trust. For relationships to be strong, they cannot be taken for granted. Extending these teachings for the purpose of this paper, among other things, the discussion will focus on the importance for schools, school districts, and all places of learning, in this age of reconciliation, to connect and develop relationships with Indigenous Peoples, communities, and organizations in their territories and how these relationships can strengthen not only Indigenous education experiences, but also learning opportunities and growth for all.

Looking to the west, this is the direction from which rain and thunder approach. As such, the gift of feeling and our emotions, which are connected to water (our tears), is situated in the western direction of the Medicine Circle. Some teachings connected to this direction relate to acknowledging the importance of feelings, not to discount them, and applying reason by connecting and balancing feelings with thoughts. Extending these teachings for the purpose of this paper, the discussion will focus on the supports needed for strengthening Indigenous education, including supports for teachers and teachers in training, supports for students, and professional development – all aimed at connecting hearts and minds toward a better appreciation for Indigenous education, more confidence in teaching Indigenous content, and expanding opportunities for student growth and success.

Finally, the northern direction of the Medicine Circle is connected to the wind and movement. The wind blows, and trees and grass move, bending with the wind. Some of the teachings in this direction relate to changes in behaviour, resiliency, and adapting how we do things to accomplish our goals. Extending these teachings for the purpose of this paper, keeping in mind NCCIE's goals aimed at strengthening Indigenous education, the discussion will focus on insights for curricular policy and program changes that enrich the learning experiences of students (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and support them in their educational journeys toward achieving their dreams.

The East – Toward a Common Understanding: What is Indigenous Education?

The sun rises in the east. With the growing daylight, the world comes into sharper focus, revealing our surroundings. With this in mind, the purpose of the discussion in the eastern direction is to shed light on the scope and breadth of Indigenous education to gain an appreciation for what Indigenous education is from an Indigenous perspective.

While those familiar with "Indigenous education" understand its many facets, other readers of this paper may be wondering, "What is indigenous education and how is it different from the education I received in school?" When seeing the phrase "Indigenous education" for the first time, without any introduction, one may assign any number of connotations. One may assume, for example, that:

- Indigenous education is the education of Indigenous students, primarily in K-12 and post-secondary schools; or
- Indigenous education is the education that takes place "on-reserve" in First Nation communities; or
- Indigenous education is a school in an urban centre that has been created by and for urban First Nation, Métis, or Inuit residents (or other Indigenous, non-status groups); or
- Indigenous education is the knowledge one receives by taking a course or being taught a subject about Indigenous Peoples, their histories, and cultures.

In fact, "Indigenous education" can be understood to be not one or the other of these interpretations but all of them taken together *and* much, much more. The discussion that ensues, while not exhaustive, is intended to shed light on how Indigenous Peoples and educators (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) describe and understand Indigenous education. First, quotes from experts and practitioners in the field of Indigenous education are shared so the reader can see first-hand the inclusive and holistic approach that "Indigenous education" takes in teaching students. From these quotes, underlying principles for "Indigenous education" are drawn to summarize key ideas that are embedded in the remarks. Each principle represents one part of the whole, forming a complete picture where no one aspect is ignored or dismissed as irrelevant. The reader is asked to regard all principles together, forming a whole, one that is greater than the sum of its parts. These insights lay the foundation for a common understanding to the question, "What is Indigenous education?", forming the basis upon which the rest of the paper and the ensuing discussions are grounded.

Listen to the Voices: What is Indigenous Education?

These remarks are direct quotations from some of the videos and stories available on the NCCIE website.[9] They reflect the inclusive and holistic nature of Indigenous education.[10] The following quotes are in no particular order.

"When our children see themselves in their schools, that's Indigenous education . . . when they have that opportunity to know that their history, their culture, their spirituality, their understanding is very much embedded in the classroom."

Shannon Dunfield, Grand Prairie Public School District, Alberta

"Indigenous education comes from a pedagogy that's based on the culture of the People that speak that language . . . Indigenous education needs to be based on a framework of respectful, reciprocal relationships."

Heather Souter, Prairies to Woodlands Indigenous Language Revitalization Circle, Manitoba

[9] Retrieved from: https://www.nccie.ca/videos/indigenous-education-community-insights-and-introspections/.

[10] Please note that the locations of the speakers may have changed since the time the interview was conducted (interviews were conducted between winter 2017-18 and spring 2019).

“My vision for Indigenous education is that we reconnect the teachings and knowledge that we have lost in this era of colonization and assimilation. I’d like to see our children, our youth, our students be reconnected with the stories and teachings of grandparents, ancestors, and our lands.”

Mary Jane Joe, Langara College, British Columbia

“Culture, our practices, and our traditional knowledge are coming into the schools by way of the Elders and by practices out on-the-land . . . Being out there in their natural environment helps them [the children] a lot . . .

“Do you see your culture in the school? Do you smell your culture? Do you smell it and feel it?”

Angela Grandjambe, Sahtu Divisional Education Council, Fort Good Hope, NWT

“I think it’s about being delivered by us. If it’s delivered by mainstream, then we are at risk of being looked at historically . . . We recognize what our children need, and we have to have some power in that so we can do that. So language learning is a big component, culture is a big component.”

Patsy McKinney, Under One Sky Friendship Centre Head Start Program, New Brunswick

“I think Indigenous education, where it is unique, is that the knowledge system is embedded within the songs, the stories, the traditions, the language. And I think that within Indigenous education there’s beginning to see a process of decolonizing education and valuing other education systems . . . taking into account lived experience, what knowledge systems people bring in that aren’t exactly pen and paper and publishing and researching, more than just what’s out there in the academic literature.”

Jaime Battiste, Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey, Nova Scotia

“Right now, we are just doing everything here in the community and in the college and going on day trips or afternoon trips. But really, they [the youth] are not spending enough time out on the land, which is what I’d like to see happen.”

Silas Arngna’naaq, Piqqusilirivvik Cultural Education Centre, Baker Lake, Nunavut

“I’d like to see more of our own community members, the younger generation, doing the medicine making, going out on the land and picking it, understanding when they pick the medicine there's a big spirituality attached to it. You don’t just go and pick. You have to understand and you have to have that faith in the medicine that the medicine is gonna help you. Without that you're just drinking juice. There’s a big part to when you're picking medicine and having that relationship with the spruce gum, having that relationship with the juniper, having that relationship with the red willows. There's a respect between you and that medicine, and I think the younger generation needs to understand that. And they need to develop that relationship with the land because if you don't - like the land is right there and it’s so ready to take care of you but we don't take care of it in return. But once you begin that relationship, it's so powerful . . .

"I see our education, our culture, when you go into the school you're gonna see our culture right there. You're gonna see a teepee when you walk in. You're gonna see programs that are developed on how to make medicine, how to survive out on the land. You're gonna see the history of residential school and what it did to our people and how today we are still standing, how today we are still strong. All that, that's what we're gonna see in 10 years."

Melinda Laboucan, GOBA – Light on the Horizon, Fort Good Hope, NT

"Two things come to mind. First of all, how are we going to be educating our Indigenous People of which I am a part. And the other question is in terms of looking at Indigenous education – well, clearly, a lot of other people need to learn a lot more about us. So we also equally need to provide opportunities for non-Indigenous people to learn, to really engage with topics, to meet presenters, appreciate different types of art, So it's sort of a balanced two-sided unity that I see."

Kakwiranó:ron Cook, First Peoples House, McGill University, Quebec

"Building alliances among Indigenous communities, bringing our ideas as a collective, and moving forward. . . If we were to come together and share our ideas and be respectful towards everybody's views, which are going to be different depending on where they come from and what their protocols they are used to, then I can see that Indigenous education being very powerful in that we need to go back to our old ways, we need our children to feel pride again, we need that identity instilled within them – not only on an academic level, but at all levels – mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually."

Riel Thomson, Chief Kahkewistahaw Community School, Saskatchewan

"Indigenous education is an education that understands that we live in a colonized society. And that we have to work harder than your average student to provide knowledge and opportunities and environments that are built *for* our students in the context they live in, not trying to force our kids into what everyone else is doing. So we know what is best for our kids, what is best for our community. We should be given the opportunity and have the flexibility to do what we know is best for us."

Neil Forbes, Lennox Island First Nation Education, Prince Edward Island

"For me, Indigenous education is just another part of our lifestyle, our way of life. We start acquiring knowledge from birth."

Stephanie Poole, Lutsel K'e Hide Tanning Camp, Northwest Territories

"It's life-long learning. You're never too old to stop learning, you know . . . I encourage everyone, anyone, to talk to the Elders . . . in terms of gathering knowledge and keeping these old stories alive."

Harold Johnson, Long Ago Peoples Place, near Champagne Village, Yukon

"You need a gathering place – a dedicated space. . . It's access and support is what I find is important. . .

"My vision has always been, and I think I'm quoting someone else . . . that we have not reached our target until every Indigenous man, woman, child, Elder has reached their fullest potential. . . . I like this statement. I wish I remembered the Elder's name . . . He said, 'To have a vision, you close your eyes so you can see further.' It tells you a lot, you know. Stop; think; you know."

Verna J. Kirkness, Associate Professor Emeritus, University of British Columbia

These quotes are just a sampling of the richness of knowledge and insights shared by Elders, Knowledge Holders, and other educators on the NCCIE website. The following discussion is gleaned from these and other speakers appearing on the website as well as from the many conversations held during the project with regional leads, student and community researchers, and community partners collaborating with NCCIE.

One initial observation that is important to note is that the phrase "Indigenous education" is a western construct. When language speakers were asked, "How do you say 'Indigenous education' in your language?", they replied that there is no word in their language that literally means "Indigenous." How they describe the education of their People varies. The Anihšināpē (Saulteaux) say, "Anihšināpē kihkinahomākēwin," which means "First People's education." Anishinaabe (Eastern Ojibwe) say, "Anishnabe kendaaswin," which translates to mean, "A Person's Knowledge;" literally, "an Ojibwe Person's Knowledge." Inuit say "ᐃᓄᓐᓂᑦ ᓄᓇᖃᖅᑐᖅᓯᒪᔨᓂᓪᓗ ᐃᓕᓐᓂᐊᕐᓂᑕᕆᓂᖅ," which translates to "Education from Inuit and First Peoples." Nehiyawak (Plains Cree) say, "iyiniw-kiskinwahamātowin," which means "a First Nations person learning or teaching one another." If interested in seeing more languages, NCCIE has included these and other ways of saying "Indigenous education" on its home page, scrolling next to the logo at the top of the page. Explanations are shared in a section of the website dedicated to Indigenous languages entitled, "'Indigenous Education' in Indigenous Languages."

All facets to Indigenous education described forthwith are intended to be viewed as a whole, rather than as separate, discrete elements, because they are interconnected and intertwine with each other. Understanding all that Indigenous education is includes understanding that:

- Indigenous education is for everyone, not just Indigenous Peoples
- Indigenous education is lifelong
- Indigenous education places the student at the centre of learning
- Indigenous education involves "all our relations"
- Indigenous education is holistic

- Indigenous education, today, takes place on-the-land, in communities, and in schools
- Indigenous education teaches what it is to be human

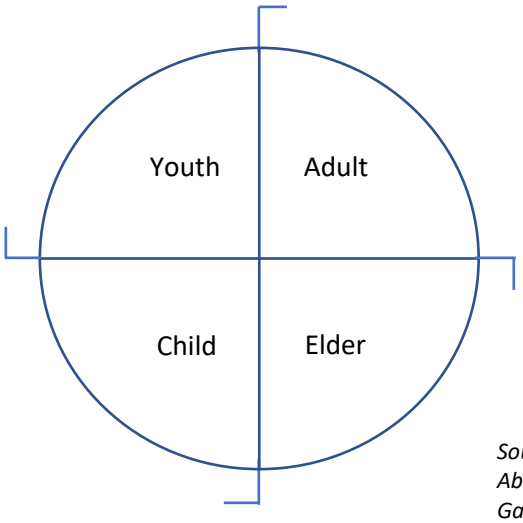
Indigenous education is for everyone

A central Medicine Circle teaching is that, just as the sun shines on the earth for everyone so life on earth can exist, Indigenous ways of knowing and being are meant for everyone, too, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The teachings shared by Elders and Knowledge Holders are for everyone's benefit, for all human beings to be able to live in balance and respect with one another and all one's relations, including the natural world of which we are a part. While the following discussion, at times, may focus on Indigenous learners and students, the reader is encouraged to reflect on how the points being made may apply to them and to others, whatever their heritage and cultural background.

Indigenous education is life-long learning

In the 1996 final report of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP; Volume 3 Chapter 5), the authors organize their discussion of education according to Medicine Circle teachings that connect learning with the life cycle, as shown in the following diagram illustrating the circle of life.

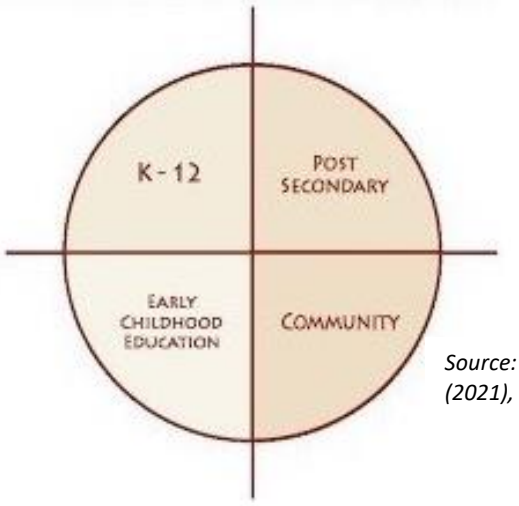
Figure 4: Medicine Circle Teachings: The Life Cycle



Source: Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996). Volume 3: Gathering Strength, p. 416.

Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem and Hare (2021) use the same set of life cycle teachings to organize their conceptual framework for Indigenous education as illustrated in Figure 5. NCCIE has adopted this same framework to describe how Indigenous education is inclusive of all stages of and avenues for learning:

Figure 5: Lifelong Learning Conceptual Framework



Source: Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem and Hare (2021), p. 135.

That is to say, education occurs throughout one's life, and the sources for learning and teaching are many and diverse. Parents, grandparents and other Elders, siblings and relatives, teachers, and classmates all have a hand in a child's education. In addition to early childhood education programs, K-12 schooling, and post-secondary learning opportunities, much can be learned from one's "community." Many Indigenous Peoples understand "community" to include not only community members or the educational programs offered by a community centre of some sort, but also "the land"[11] where one lives. Several of the quotes above refer to "the land" as our teacher, where "the land" is a descriptor inclusive of the earth, sky, waters, and all living beings found there, seen and unseen. "The land" as our teacher is discussed in ensuing sections as this understanding is integral to many facets of Indigenous education.

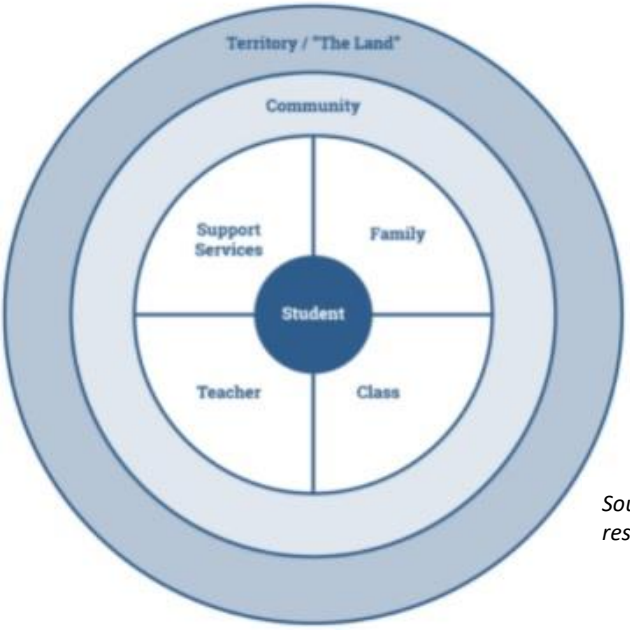
Indigenous education places the student at the centre of learning

An initial understanding that underpins Indigenous education is that the student is both at the centre of learning and at the centre of policy decisions for learning. As illustrated in Figure 6, every relationship is important for the well-being and growth of each student. These include a student's teacher(s) and fellow classmates, the student's family, and the school's supports that are in place (for mind, body, and spirit – i.e., academic, physical, emotional, and cultural supports). When a school provides opportunities to strengthen these relationships by involving parents, grandparents, and other community members in school activities, all students can benefit from these interactions. As well, connecting with a student's community so that the student sees their community and culture reflected in the school is important. Also, ensuring that a student's education includes experiences that strengthen their connections with the land and nature around them is central to a student's well-being. Any and all of these

[11] "The land" in quotation marks is used in this paper as a short-form for referring to all of Creation, including the plants and animals, the crawlers, slitherers, the winged ones, the trees and fish, the two-leggeds, the water, air, earth, and rocks, the sun, the moon, the stars, everything seen and unseen.

connections can have positive or negative impacts on a student's progress, depending on the strength and health of these relationships. The understanding is that all these relationships, taken together and individually, but not omitting any, are important for the health and well-being (i.e., success) of a student along one's learning journey.

Figure 6: Students Are Placed at the Centre of Learning Decisions



Source: https://www.nccie.ca/teaching-resource-centre/foundations/

Indigenous education involves "all our relations"

The above diagrams can also be looked at from the perspective of "all our relations." "All our relations" is a phrase uttered by many Indigenous Peoples to acknowledge how we are all connected as well as to give thanks to all our relatives for sustaining us, for we are dependent upon them for our very existence. In part, our relatives include the human beings who have brought us into the world – our parents, their parents/our grandparents, and all our ancestors who have come before us. Without them, we would not exist. In Indigenous circles, together with others in the community, these were a child's teachers. Knowledge of how to live and how to respect others has been passed down from one generation to the next over millennia via oral traditions.

Similarly, our other relatives include the plants, the animals, the trees, the birds, the waters, the rocks and earth, wind/air, sun, moon, and stars. Without these relatives, we would not exist. For they not only nourish us and give us energy, they are also our teachers, teaching us and reminding us of our "original instructions" how to survive and thrive and live in balance with Creation. The teaching, "take care of the land and the land will take care of you" is one such "original instruction" that encompasses many learnings, including the responsibilities of being in relationship, reciprocity, sharing, caring, and much more.

Another acknowledgement with the words “all our relatives” is our relationship with the unseen “spirit world.” Over the millennia, spirit beings have guided Indigenous Peoples and provided them with important knowledge and insights for their survival and well-being. The great mystery of the unseen has much to teach us about humility, respect, and so much more.

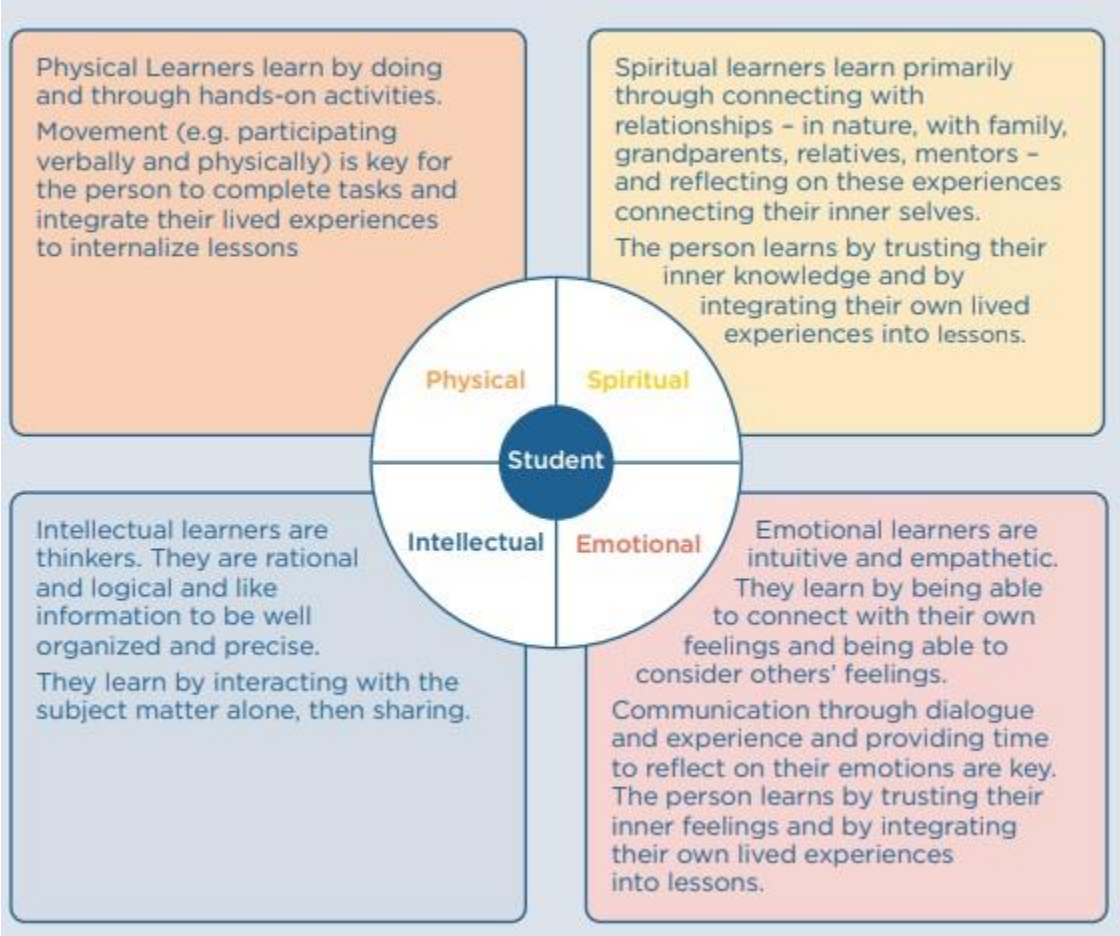
Indigenous education, respecting “all our relations,” involves turning to our many relatives to teach us how to live and be in this world. One Elder shares a story from her youth, when her father took her out on the trap line and taught her biology when trapping animals, skinning and preparing them for cooking.[12] Her grandmother taught her botany and chemistry when gathering plants, learning when to harvest them and how to prepare different medicines with them. When she enrolled in a “western” school to continue her education, she excelled in these and other subjects because she had already learned so much – from “the land” as well as from her parents and grandparents.

Indigenous education is holistic

In addition to being holistic through active involvement of “all our relations” in teaching and learning, by placing the student at the centre of learning, Indigenous education is holistic in understanding how learning takes place – that each student is unique, and each learns in multiple ways. Students are spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual beings. Indigenous education recognizes this fact by engaging students through a variety of learning methods that reflect their diverse learning styles. NCCIE, with the guidance of Elders and Knowledge Holders, developed the following diagram to illustrate how learners often learn using one or more learning style.

[12] Margaret Reynolds (Beauval, SK), personal communication. December 14, 2020. Also, see : https://www.nccie.ca/national-gathering/first-national-gathering/.

Figure 7: A Four-Directions Education Model



Source: NCCIE Strategic Guide for Lesson Plan Template, NCCIE with R.L. Paulsen, p. 4. https://www.nccie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NCCIE-Lesson-Plan-Strategic-Guide.pdf.

While "Western" pedagogies often label different learning styles as either visual, auditory, or kinesthetic (Barbe, Swassing & Milone, 1979; 1981), within Indigenous education learning styles can be thought of in terms of different ways to connect with and nurture the whole being – the mind, body, spirit, and heart, as is described in the diagram above. Approaching how a lesson is taught by thinking of alternative activities to connect with all facets of a human being (i.e., physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional) increases the ways in which students with different strengths and gifts can be supported in their learning. To respect these diverse ways in which each student may learn, NCCIE also worked with Elders and Knowledge Holders to develop the following list of questions to guide lesson plan development so that it can be as holistic and inclusive as possible (see the checklist on NCCIE.CA):

- How are Indigenous languages and cultures included? Are they done so respectfully, with permission, and acknowledged where applicable, and with the

involvement of language speakers and Knowledge Holders where possible? Are opportunities included for oral, written, and visual communication?
- Is a participatory, hands-on, or experiential learning activity included in the lesson?
- Are Elders and Knowledge Holders involved in the development or delivery of a lesson, encouraging intergenerational learning?
- How are family members or other community members involved in the lesson, providing another opportunity for intergenerational learning?
- Does an activity or lesson include an opportunity to be and learn outdoors, out on-the-land, so students can nurture a respectful relationship with the land?
- Are Indigenous ways of assessment offered? These often differ from a conventional grading system.
- Does an activity or lesson contribute to developing healthy relationships in school, with family, or in the community?
- Does an activity or lesson provide opportunities to practice ethics in the classroom, regarding care, respect, truthfulness and trust, and integrity?
- Does an activity or lesson support a positive relationship with oneself and one's identity?
- Is there an opportunity to look inward and reflect on one's thoughts and feelings during an activity or lesson?
- Is there an opportunity during the activity or lesson to draw connections with everyday life outside of school?

While not exhaustive, this list encourages educators and schools to apply an Indigenous lens to their teaching methods, acknowledging each student as spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual beings and, considering all these facets, respecting the diverse ways in which students learn.

Indigenous education, today, takes place on-the-land, in communities, and in schools

From an Indigenous perspective, Indigenous People's knowledges have been passed on from generation to generation through an oral tradition steeped in a spiritual relationship with all Creation, grounded in the land, the cosmos, and laws of nature. Before contact with European settlers, ceremonies, storytelling, and communal child-rearing and kinship practices were all ways for transferring knowledge from one generation to the next. Pre-contact, ceremonies were woven into the fabric of everyday life from gathering and preparing foods and medicines to hunting and gathering, with the changing seasons, and with each rite of passage from birth to death. Spirituality was intrinsic to the relationships upon which a community relied for its very survival. This knowledge had to be passed on for the community's continued well-being.[13]

[13] Source of information for this discussion retrieved October 6, 2021 from: https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/abed101/a-short-history-of-indigenous-education-in-canada/. See video resources by Professor Jean-Paul Restoule, Anishinaabe scholar and educator.

Today, spirituality remains integral to everyday living for those who keep ceremonial knowledge alive. Many across Canada still honour their People's ceremonies in daily practice and with each changing season. They have made it their life purpose to keep their knowledge alive, passing on their ways of knowing and being so future generations can benefit from wisdom grown over millennia. While much was lost as a result of colonization, much remains and is being reclaimed and strengthened through ceremonies, land-based learning,[14] and in communities all across the country.[15]

With colonization, however, the nature of Indigenous education has been forced to adapt to colonial education priorities – that of learning *subject* knowledge (i.e., Math, Science, Literature, History, etc.) rather than *living* knowledge (i.e., knowledge for being in relationship with each other and "all our relations"). From a western, colonial style of teaching in school systems, Indigenous education is often looked upon as, at the very least, rebalancing how Canada's history is taught so that the subject matter includes an Indigenous lens rather than relying solely on the dominant, colonial one. Or it can hold another place along the education spectrum (see Figure 8) where Indigenous perspectives are infused into teaching mainstream subjects such as science, math, the arts, and literature, in addition to history.[16]

With the latter, it is possible for Indigenous ways of knowing and being to be woven into every subject taught. In one conversation for this paper, a community member explained that Indigenous education cannot be limited to a Cultural Studies course or a unit within Social Studies or History. While the tendency may be to "put Indigenous education in a box," she says that Indigenous education is found throughout all subjects.[17]

Participants in other discussions echoed this sentiment that Indigenous education ought not to be "pigeonholed" or "compartmentalized" within certain mainstream subjects, such as Environmental or Social Justice, because, as one individual remarks, "Indigenous education needs to be a thing unto itself."[18]

Indigenous education teaches what it is to be a human

Building on the conviction that "Indigenous education needs to be a thing unto itself," Willie Ermine, an Elder and ceremonialist as well as a noted scholar and retired

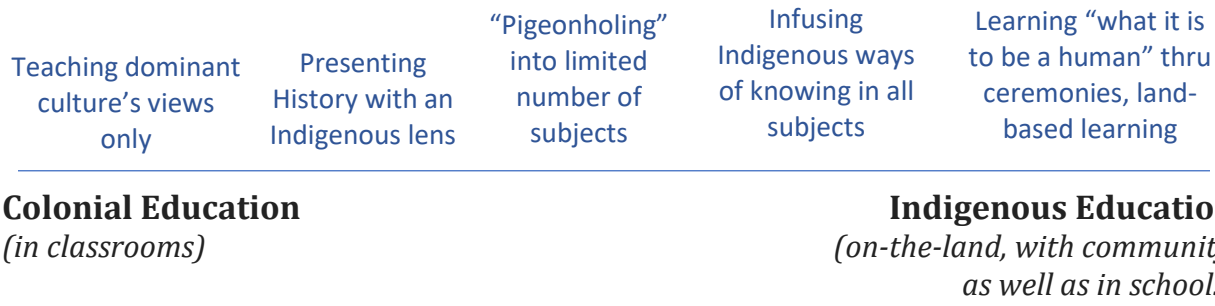
[14] Land-based learning is the transfer of knowledge on-the-land and from the land. Everything from gathering foods and medicines, hunting and fishing, the changing seasons, the different moons and moon phases, the night sky, and all the ceremonies that are practiced with this knowledge are distinct to the place where one lives.
[15] Explore some of the many stories about Indigenous education initiatives and programs across Canada on NCCIE.CA.
[16] Source of information for this discussion retrieved October 6, 2021 from: https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/abed101/a-short-history-of-indigenous-education-in-canada/. See video resources by Professor Jean-Paul Restoule, Anishinaabe scholar and educator.
[17] Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.
[18] Northwest Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 17, 2020.

professor from First Nations University of Canada, stresses, “Education is not just mental, academic; it is also spiritual.”[19] He states,

> How do we want to structure education? Being only in a classroom disrupts our mind about what is education. What education can happen in a classroom with a teacher? . . . Put education in a natural setting. Young working with the old. Male and female. This is community work . . . Consider the community context, not the classroom context. It is good to arm teachers with lesson plans, but education is not just mental, academic. It is also spiritual . . . This is for non-Indigenous learners, too. It is for everyone. Non-Indigenous people were not “westernized” 10,000 years ago. This way of learning is the learning of humanity, not the 3 R’s. Indigenous education is reminding them that they are human. Indigenous education teaches what it is to be a human.[20]

Teaching “what it is to be a human” can be placed along a spectrum of education illustrated in Figure 8:

Figure 8: A Spectrum of Education Practices from an Indigenous Perspective



From an Indigenous perspective, one aim for Indigenous education in mainstream schools today is to move toward the right side of this spectrum where schools reconcile their colonial ways, infusing Indigenous ways of knowing in all subjects as well as creating opportunities to teach and practice “what it is to be a human.” Moving to the right side of the spectrum also means expanding how Indigenous cultures are present in schools and actively providing students with opportunities to learn from the land and with family and community (or if non-Indigenous, to invite members of a nearby community to lead and participate in Indigenous education activities).

For Indigenous education from the viewpoint of Elders and Knowledge Holders, only so much can be learned sitting in a classroom, reading books, and having theoretical discussions. Granted, certain core values in Indigenous philosophies (such as respect,

[19] kêhtê-ayak Elders, personal communication. kêhtê-ayak Elders Council meeting, First Nations University of Canada, September 10, 2021.
[20] Ibid.

truth, and other cultural teachings[21]) can be practiced in group and classroom activities. Elders and Knowledge Holders know that teaching "what it is to be a human" is most effectively imparted through experiential learning on-the-land, with community as well as in ceremonies.[22] In his journal article, *The Ethical Space of Engagement*, Willie Ermine (Ermine, 2007) writes, "In Indigenous societies, the Elders and the oral traditions provide us with the codes of conduct as human beings within our communities" (p. 195). He quotes Gregory Cajete (1994; p. 164) who notes, "the community is the place where the forming of the heart and face of the individual as one of the people is most fully expressed" (p. 200). Willie Ermine then elucidates:

> The Indigenous community is the primary expression of a natural context and environment where exists the fundamental right of personhood to be what one is meant to be. Movement within this community context allows individuals to discover all there is to discover about one's self. This is a gaze that remembers a time before colonialism and one that reflects a belief in itself as a human community (p. 200).

To reiterate what Willie Ermine has said, "This way of learning is the learning of humanity." Learning "what it is to be a human," at its core, is growing to be a good human being - to be of a good mind, strong in body, and caring in spirit. It is living in kind, respectful relationship with others, with "all our relations," and living in ways that contribute to the well-being of one's community, including the land of which human beings are a part.

Another Elder and ceremonialist, Michael Thrasher, uses a feather to illustrate the education and development of a human being and "what it is to be a human."[23] One side of the feather represents "skill development" – for individuals to learn from the land and from their teachers to provide food, shelter, and clothing for their community. This is balanced with the other side of the feather, equally essential, representing "human development" – for individuals to learn the values, philosophies, and spirituality of the People. Both are required to sustain the life of the individual and the well-being of the community. Just as a bird cannot fly with broken or half feathers, for a person to be strong in mind, body, and spirit, one's education must not only be "academic, mental," it must also be spiritual.

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[21] Many Indigenous Peoples pass on cultural teachings related to human conduct towards others, including "all our relations." They may vary between Peoples, but core values often overlap. For example, the Anishinaabe "Seven Grandfather teachings" are wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth. Cree cultural teachings are respect, protocol, humility, sharing and generosity, faith, kindness, and passing on teachings. Sources: https://empoweringthespirit.ca/cultures-of-belonging/seven-grandfathers-teachings/ and https://creeliteracy.org/2014/06/11/cree-cultural-teachings/.

[22] kêhtê-ayak Elders, personal communication. kêhtê-ayak Elders Council meeting, First Nations University of Canada, September 10, 2021.

[23] M. Thrasher (1987). *Blue Book* (unpublished document).

Figure 9: The Feather Illustrating Two Facets of Knowledge Passed on in Oral Traditions of Indigenous Education

Source: M. Thrasher (1987). Blue Book.

This discussion brings us full circle, merging all the facets to Indigenous education presented thus far into one whole. Indigenous education has been framed in overarching, general terms as an holistic approach to teaching that has attributes that are distinct from a Western or colonial approach to education. Willie Ermine's insights bring the focus back to the individual and the holistic approach to a person's growth and development as a human being, living in and part of a community and the responsibilities therein. That Indigenous education is not just mental or academic, but spiritual in nature, that it is of benefit to all human beings, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Indigenous education is lifelong learning where the young learn alongside and from the old. The learner is at the centre of learning – where each person's innate gifts are identified and nurtured. In Indigenous education, respecting "all our relations" teaches us how we are connected to all of Creation and how the land (including all beings seen and unseen) is our first teacher.

The purpose of this discussion has been to reveal the breadth and depth of Indigenous education as *a holistic approach to teaching and supporting students* (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) throughout their learning journeys. This foundational understanding provides common ground upon which to consider and act upon the policy recommendations in this report aimed at strengthening Indigenous education and education for all. Two overarching recommendations that are interconnected are presented first to further underpin the learnings and recommendations that NCCIE regional teams and community partners have voiced:

Recommendation 1: Be mindful of the diversity amongst Indigenous Peoples. Policy solutions need to take into account unique circumstances; they cannot be one-size-fits-all.

> Policy solutions cannot be one-size-fits-all because communities' experiences, and those of their students, are unique and dependent on where they are. This holds true for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis across the country as well as whether students are in the city or on-reserve. It is true whether they are victims – or the children and grandchildren of victims – of the 60's scoop or residential schools. To share one set of comments to illustrate this point, an individual with first-hand experience has noted, "it is hard to get off-reserve." Even if a city is close by, "it is a world away and their worldviews are different." He notes that students coming from the reserve to a university have difficulty "fitting in" and succeeding. Likewise, Indigenous inhabitants of the city often have a hard life. He says that for these students, "it is life first," and "school is a low priority." They are just trying to make ends meet, he says. In the high school where he worked for a time, students told him stories of carrying weapons because they "got jumped all the time."[24] "Everyone is on their own journey," he says. His comments reinforce the need for a range of policy solutions for strengthening Indigenous education to address a wide range of circumstances.

Another individual's comments sum up this recommendation, saying:

> It's very important that we always remember that a pan-Indigenous approach to . . . transformative change in Indigenous education will never work. . . It's important to . . . understand that just as my People in our communities bring knowledge from their spaces, their communities, their lands that are integral contributions to society, so do others." She goes on to acknowledge that "collective work" in transforming education is important, but "When we move together as a collective, we do so respecting the autonomy of our Indigenous nations and places and communities as well.[25]

Recommendation 2: Be holistic and systems-thinking when making changes to policy and curricula for strengthening Indigenous education and its support networks, while respecting Recommendation #1, resisting one-size-fits-all approaches.

This recommendation keeps the students front and centre when considering and setting in motion changes to strengthen Indigenous education. By keeping the *whole* student in mind – their emotional, spiritual, physical, and intellectual well-being – a whole range of actions can be identified and implemented to adapt educational systems to the needs of their Indigenous students. As one individual puts it, issues need to be approached "from

[24] Southwest Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 25, 2020. Often, recommendations and insights into recommendations are shared among NCCIE regions and voiced in a number of Zoom discussions. For this paper, one of what could be several attributions has been selected to represent the consensus.

[25] Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.

a lens of equality and equity." For example, he recommends adopting hiring practices so that Indigenous students "see themselves" in their schools. He explains that while qualified Indigenous educators may not have the degrees or certificates attached to their names, "they have a wealth of knowledge based on lived experiences." In addition, "a lot more supports in schools are needed for Indigenous students than non-Indigenous students" to aid them emotionally, financially, culturally, as well as academically. "Do not think of it as a 'hand out' or 'leg up,' he says, "but as 'access.'" He explains that some students are coming to university, for example, "from a community of 5,000 or less and are all of a sudden on a campus with 40,000 people." Because of the dominant culture that is pervasive in schools, "Indigenous students get lost and experience culture shock."[26] With these realities in mind, a "systems-thinking" approach can benefit Indigenous students as well as non-Indigenous students and the school as a whole.

In summary, policy development and any resulting actions aimed at strengthening Indigenous education need to be "systems-thinking" in their approach, respecting the "whole student" and recognizing the benefits of Indigenous education for all students, whatever their cultural background, while at the same time resisting the temptation to make blanket policies that do not account for students', schools', or communities' unique circumstances.

The South – Recommendations for Strengthening Relationships

The sun traveling across the sky marks the passage of time. With time, relationships are created and strengthened. As discussed in the eastern direction, one of the many facets of Indigenous education is that it involves "all our relations." The following quote by a community member from NunatuKavut in Labrador describes the centrality of relationships to one's very existence, let alone one's education:

> One of my greatest learnings has been through our own youth, our own people on the ground and in our own communities who fundamentally continue to teach me and others that our culture, our stories, our knowledge, our expertise come from the lands, waters, and ice around us. It comes from our place. We are who we are because of our relations in these places that continue. And this is . . . important to people today with respect to whether it's a colonial education, like the provincial education system, or whether it's homegrown . . . the traditional forms of education. Our people continue to tell me and us that all facets of education are important and that one of the greatest forms of education still comes through intergenerational knowledge transfer. Whether that's from grandparents to children or what have you - that stories are so important. That people are actually concerned that if people stop telling stories, then our culture will be forgotten. That tells me that there is a significant connection between culture and the ways we live and the knowledge

[26] Southwest Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 25, 2020.

holders who possess those stories and the future education of our children.[27]

With this in mind, the recommendations in this southern direction focus on the importance of the many relationships in education – with people, place, and language, all of which are interconnected. Their aim is to reinforce the many relationships students depend upon in their education, acknowledging how important relationships are, including with "the land."

Recommendation 3: Foster opportunities to build and strengthen relationships with and increase involvement of Indigenous Peoples in the fabric of one's school.

This recommendation has many facets:

- For Indigenous students, it means teachers reaching out to parents or grandparents, many of whom may not have a positive view of education given their or their relatives' impacts from residential schools. Finding ways to bridge this gap and create a welcoming atmosphere for them may not be easy. However, increasing a parent's, grandparent's or other relative's involvement in their child's education will go a long way to support that student's learning journey, growth, and well-being.
- For the benefit of all students, it means teachers (or schools as a whole) reaching out to a school's or school district's Indigenous Education Liaison or Coordinator. If a teacher does not know where to begin to connect with Indigenous community members in their region, their school or school district may have someone on staff who has established connections already and can assist in making introductions, following cultural protocols. The Liaison/Coordinator may know who is available to help from nearby communities and who is not available (i.e., some communities may be stretched beyond their capacity and may have challenges meeting their own schools' needs). A school district's Indigenous Education Liaison/Coordinator is also likely to have at their fingertips teaching resources, such as those found on NCCIE.CA and other websites, for educators to access and use in their classroom.
- For the benefit of everyone – educators, students, and administrators alike – it means seeking out opportunities to learn and grow from each other. Randy Qattalik, a teacher in Nunavut who worked with NCCIE as a research associate, comments, "What we need to do is communicate with one another, share our stories, so we can work together so we can expand our educational programs to each community."[28] Like many involved in NCCIE, he supports face-to-face conversations because so much can be gained from meeting together and learning directly from each other. NCCIE encourages connecting directly with one another other on its website by sharing information about how to contact an educator, a school, or other organization and ask questions about a program or initiative found on NCCIE.CA.

[27] Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.
[28] Randy Qattalik. Youth Panel, Second NCCIE National Gathering, August 16, 2019. https://www.nccie.ca/national-gathering/second-national-gathering/.

Recommendation 4: Increase opportunities for students to connect with the land and learn from the land.

While the benefits of being and learning outdoors have received greater recognition over the last several years in "Western society" (Hanscom, 2016; Louv, 2005; Louv, 2016), on-the-land learning or land-based education has been a way of life that has sustained Indigenous Peoples around the world for millennia. Many of the quotes shared earlier in this report point to the central connection between land and people and how the land is our first teacher. Isaac Murdoch states, "Our education comes from the land, and it also comes from the spirits, the clouds, the stars . . . The Elders have the answers to how to live on earth . . . It's really important to immerse our young children in the language and on the land."[29] Angela Grandjambe notes, "Being out there in their natural environment helps them [the children] a lot."[30] Experiential learning and "learning through doing" while out on-the-land is beneficial for students, helping them to learn important life skills and internalize knowledge, and strengthening their minds, bodies, and spirits, regardless of their cultural identity. For Indigenous students, learning on-the-land helps them to connect with their roots, their identity, because so much of who they are is embedded in and comes from their relationship with "the land," with Turtle Island. For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners, learning-through-doing includes strengthening one's relationship with the land and spending time out in nature learning about this relationship, not being stuck learning in a classroom.[31] Learning how we are a part of nature, not apart from it, is an important tenet central to Indigenous education that can benefit educational practice in general.

Recommendation 5: Increase opportunities, resources, and funding for students to connect with, reclaim, and learn Indigenous languages so that ties to the land are reinforced and the knowledge held within is not lost.

Jaime Battiste observes, "I think Indigenous education, where it is unique, is that the knowledge system is embedded within the songs, the stories, the traditions, the language."[32] So much knowledge is embedded in the Indigenous languages of the world; they are the repository of important knowledge originating from the land. It is important for Indigenous Peoples to strengthen and reclaim their languages, so this knowledge is not lost and is passed on to future generations. This need has been long recognized, as asserted in the 1972 policy paper, "Indian Control of Indian Education":

> The Indian people are expressing growing concern that the native languages are being lost; that the younger generations can no longer

[29] Isaac Murdoch. Retrieved from: https://www.nccie.ca/story/connecting-to-land/.
[30] Angela Grandjambe. Retrieved from: https://www.nccie.ca/story/knowledge-keeper/.
[31] Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 25, 2020.
[32] Jaime Battiste. Retrieved from: https://www.nccie.ca/story/treaty-education-mikmaw-kinamatnewey-jaime-battiste/.

> speak or understand their mother tongue. If the Indian identity is to be preserved, steps must be taken to reverse this trend.[33]

Funding is needed to expand the language resources that Indigenous Peoples are producing. On its website, NCCIE has supported efforts to strengthen Indigenous languages with a variety of resources, stories, and lesson plans. As well, NCCIE's website shares a lesson plan template for teaching Indigenous languages. Anyone can access it and apply it in their teaching practice.

The NCCIE.CA website also exists in French. Specific to Indigenous Peoples in Québec where many only speak their language, with French as a second language (or vice versa), Indigenous education resources in French – for teaching languages as well as subject matter with an Indigenous lens – are in short supply and increasingly in demand.[34] Funding the development of Indigenous education materials in French will benefit schools in Québec as well as French immersion and language programs in other provinces. However, this funding should not be at the expense of funding in support of Indigenous language initiatives and the development of Indigenous language teaching resources.

Recommendation 6: "Nothing about us without us"[35]

This policy directive coincides with the long-held principle, "Indigenous control of Indigenous education" (National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations, 1972) One community member explains this statement, saying that when it comes to teaching something with an Indigenous perspective, "Indigenous collaborators need to be in the driver's seat, while non-Indigenous collaborators are in the passenger seat."[36] Similarly, another community member states,

> You can't educate our children without us. When wanting to learn about our People and culture, invite them. They can only imagine that – when they are not invited – mistruths are being perpetuated and this perpetuates mistrust among Indigenous Peoples of dominant, colonial systems."[37]

Looking at systemic issues that have persisted to the detriment of Indigenous students and Indigenous education, another person notes that "decisions are being made without the people who are affected by them. We need accountability because we do not have Indigenous voices in 'the system.'"[38]

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[33] Retrieved December 15, 2021 from: https://oneca.com/IndianControlofIndianEducation.pdf; page 15.
[34] Québec Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 9, 2020.
[35] Southeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 16, 2020.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.
[38] Alberta Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.

This recommendation echoes the calls in the 1972 policy paper for "Indian Control of Indian Education," which states:

> Based on two education principles recognized in Canadian society: Parental Responsibility and Local Control of Education, Indian parents seek participation and partnership with the Federal Government, whose legal responsibility for Indian education is set by the treaties and the Indian Act. . . . [O]nly Indian people can develop a suitable philosophy of education based on Indian values adapted to modern living.[39]

The 1972 policy paper further proclaims:

> What we want for our children can be summarized very briefly: - to reinforce their Indian identity, - to provide the training necessary for making a good living in modern society. We are the best judges of the kind of school programs which can contribute to these goals without causing damage to the child.[40]

In summary, policies for strengthening Indigenous education need to respect the many relationships that affect student learning. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students will benefit from an education that involves the Indigenous Peoples in whose territory they reside, creating an inclusive atmosphere where they can "smell and feel" the culture in their schools.[41] Developing relationships with neighbouring communities or with Indigenous organizations in one's town or city is essential. Inviting community members to provide direction and guidance in a school's Indigenous education initiatives will strengthen the school's education overall. Finally, students' relationships with "the land" are equally important. Increasing time spent connecting with "the land" and learning from it will benefit all students in mind, body, and spirit.

The West – Recommendations for Strengthening Supports for Educators, Teachers, and Students

The gift of feeling is connected with the western direction of the Medicine Circle. The recommendations in this section focus on the supports needed for strengthening Indigenous education, including supports for Knowledge Holders and Elders, for teachers and teachers in training, supports for students, and professional development – all aimed at connecting hearts and minds toward a better appreciation for Indigenous education, more confidence in teaching Indigenous content, and expanding opportunities for student growth and success.

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[39] Retrieved December 15, 2021 from: https://oneca.com/IndianControlofIndianEducation.pdf; page 3.
[40] Ibid., page 3.
[41] Angela Grandjambe, *Sahtu Divisional Education Council, Fort Good Hope, NWT* Retrieved from: https://www.nccie.ca/story/knowledge-keeper/. Also see: https://www.nccie.ca/videos/indigenous-education-community-insights-and-introspections/.

In pursuit of these aims, NCCIE has created a resource to support educators in their efforts to infuse Indigenous education into teaching, entitled, *Weaving Indigenous Education into Your Practice: A Teacher's Resource Guide.* As well, NCCIE has collaborated with Indigenous partners and communities to develop several lesson plans and videos with an Indigenous lens, covering a wide range of subjects, which are also available on the website in the NCCIE Teaching Resource Centre. A template[42] was created for developing these lesson plans, and it is available for anyone to apply in their teaching practice.

The following recommendations, as well as the others found in this report, challenge conventional approaches to education. As one community member asserts, "The system set up by the colonial system is not the only way."[43] These recommendations respect Indigenous ways of knowing as critical to everyone's education – learning "what it is to be a human" and to live in respectful relationship with "all our relatives." They provide guidance for policy and curricular changes to strengthen Indigenous education for everyone's benefit.

Recommendation 7: Increase equitability in core funding for Indigenous education; increase accountability and transparency; increase internet bandwidth and speeds

This recommendation has many facets and applies to Indigenous education initiatives wherever they are offered – on-reserve, in communities, as well as off-reserve and in urban settings. First, equitable funding that is available as multi-year core funding, rather than having to apply annually for individual one-time grants, will provide security and longevity toward sustaining important educational programs that pass on important knowledge from one generation to the next for Indigenous students and learners of all ages.[44] As one individual notes, "Those living the teachings, they are all volunteers; they do not have any funding."[45] Reliable sources of compensation for Elders and Knowledge Holders as well as funding for their language, land-based learning, and other Indigenous education programs will eliminate stress and free up people's time and energy for teaching and learning.

Another facet to this recommendation is increasing core funding of Indigenous and Inuit communities to meet the technological and connectivity needs of their students in the 21st century. Too many communities, even ones in southern Canada, still rely on dial-up connections to access the internet with low bandwidth and slow speeds, exacerbating the technological gap and disadvantaging families, schools, and workplaces. Every First Nation, Métis, and Inuit community across Canada needs the same high speed internet access that non-Indigenous Canadians enjoy and take for granted as a given right.

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[42] Two templates are available – one for teaching a subject with an Indigenous lens and another for teaching Indigenous languages. Accompanying documentation and explanatory material to aid in the use of these templates are also provided at: https://www.nccie.ca/teaching-resource-centre/templates/.

[43] Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.

[44] Vancouver Island Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 23, 2020.

[45] Alberta Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.

With respect to accountability and transparency, one discussion group notes that while government funding has been "earmarked for Indigenous education K-12, the dollars are not getting there."[46] That is, provincial funding has been distributed to school districts or post-secondary education as part of First Nations, Métis, Inuit (FNMI) funding allocations, but there is no accountability that these dollars are applied accordingly. If FNMI funds are deposited into a general account, who is held responsible for how those funds are spent? What assurances are there that that the funding is applied to strengthen Indigenous education?

Additionally, for many educational systems, a key statistic that is tracked is graduation rates: how many Indigenous students graduate each year? What about the number of Indigenous students originally enrolled that subsequently drop out and do not graduate? One person observes,

> This data is removed and not counted so that the statistics look good. . . They are literally making these children invisible . . .They need to be helping these kids, not writing them out. . . . If the dollars are not enough or not getting to them or something, there is something wrong there.[47]

The people in this discussion group recommend that better measures need to be in place to ensure that the funding is actually allocated to Indigenous education and to improving learning outcomes. Monitoring how many Indigenous students leave school and why, for example, is key to understanding where funds need to be applied to improve learning experiences, support Indigenous students, and increase graduation rates. A "watchdog" or "watchdog group" is needed at district or provincial levels to ensure FNMI dollars are applied for Indigenous education and not misappropriated elsewhere. Further, those recruited to be part of this "evaluation" group need to be people who are knowledgeable about and directly involved in Indigenous education, because as one person comments,

> What people talk about is the frustration of having no Indigenous voices within that system to impact change . . . All these decisions that are made – money, for example – seem to exclude the people who are involved in the programs who know what should be done with the money.[48]

The bottom line is that the long-reported gap in per capita funding for on- and off-reserve schools, while some strides have been made in recent years, is still a significant issue along with accountability and transparency concerns. These gaps continue to raise barriers for Indigenous students, limiting Indigenous programming and supports, compensation for Elders and Knowledge Holders,

[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

and equitable access to the internet and other educational opportunities that are readily enjoyed by non-Indigenous students across the country.[49]

Recommendation 8: Recognize Elders and Knowledge Holders as instructors equal to certified teachers. Strengthen community-based involvement of Elders and Knowledge Holders in leading and teaching Indigenous ways of knowing in school subjects and activities.

This recommendation builds on recommendations #3 and #6, expanding the actors from school-level administrators and teachers to government, both Ministries or Departments of Education and other agencies. In this era of reconciliation, it is incumbent upon everyone to recognize the benefits of Indigenous ways of knowing and the valuable knowledge and insights that these knowledge systems offer for learning and living. This recommendation responds to Call to Action 62 from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which states:

> 62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:
>
> i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.
>
> ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
>
> iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
>
> iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

It is also important to recognize the people in First Nations and in Métis and Inuit communities – in rural, remote, and urban places – who hold and take care of this knowledge that has been passed down from one generation to the next. Many of these Knowledge Holders have spent much of their lifetime learning these ways living on-the-land and/or in ceremonies (or both). It is important to involve them in educating our children – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. One community member explains:

> Certain experts have the credentials and recognition. But at the local level within our communities, there are people who have knowledge that is so vastly valuable and profound, but they are not really recognized or engaged in ways that they should. So that needs to shift and change. What is valued in education needs to change. It's not just "book smarts." It's not how many degrees you have and how many books you've read –

[49] Retrieved December 16, 2021 from: https://ualbertalaw.typepad.com/faculty/2020/10/lets-talk-gaps-in-education-for-on-off-reserve-first-nations-peoples.html.

> those books that have been written, by and large, by historians that were white, male, Europeans. . . The system set up by the colonial system is not the only way.[50]

Another community member echoes this sentiment, commenting that she had assumed for most of her adult life, given the education she received in school, that "all the experts were 'out there' somewhere." She now realizes, through her work and the projects she has collaborated on with NCCIE, that "*we* are the experts when it comes to our own People and the work that we do and how we do it." She goes on to say how "we often get portrayed as a loin-cloth wearing, wandering band of people that if it hadn't been for European contact, it would have been over for us," which of course is untrue. She emphasizes that "it is really important to turn inward, not . . . outward, for [knowledge pertaining to her People], because if it doesn't come from us, it sometimes gets skewed."[51]

For the second part of this recommendation – i.e., increasing community-based involvement – it is one thing to recognize that many people in Indigenous communities have valuable knowledge to share. Establishing expectations for schools to make those connections, build relationships, and find those who have the time to work with schools is another. Policies, along with the necessary supports, are needed so that schools can follow-through on these expectations. For example, hiring resource staff, such as an Indigenous Education Coordinator or Liaison, is essential. Schools and teachers will be able to reach out to a school district's Indigenous Education Coordinator for assistance. He/She/They is likely to know who to contact in local Indigenous communities and organizations. Once protocols are followed and introductions made, a school will likely need to invest time and effort to develop those relationships to the point where someone feels comfortable coming into the school to work with teachers and deliver lessons or participate in other school activities. Learning the appropriate cultural protocols to follow is part of this learning journey. As well, financial compensation that is commensurate with the knowledge they hold and are willing to share is essential, remembering that while they may not have a diploma, their lived experiences, and in some cases significant sacrifice, have given them a deep education. Some of the comments from discussions that correspond to this recommendation are paraphrased here:

- Improve partnerships between community-based programs and schools for more access to local people with local knowledge. This would help strengthen, for example, Inuktut language and culture.[52] In other settings, it would benefit not only the Indigenous students in the school and their self-identities, and how they see themselves reflected in the school, but also non-Indigenous students and teachers, enriching education in many ways.[53]

[50] Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Nunavut Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 1, 2020.
[53] Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 25, 2020. Also, see: https://www.nccie.ca/story/indigenous-education-at-st-davids-public-school/.

- Have 'local knowledge' represented. If a school is in Anishinaabe territory, teach with local Anishinaabe ways of knowing; if Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), teach local Haudenosaunee ways of knowing.[54]
- Become informed about local cultural protocols and practices as well as the differences in languages and dialects in the area (e.g., there are several Anishinaabe dialects, Haudenosaunee languages, etc.). It is important to become informed about local protocols and practices, and this information cannot be found on the internet or in the library. Hence, the importance for a knowledgeable resource person, such as an Indigenous Education Coordinator/Liaison, to be on staff and accessible.[55]
- Increase representation of Indigenous Knowledge Holders and Elders, for example with a Knowledge Holder or Elders Council, so they can oversee and guide anything that involves "our People."[56]
- Learn from those with "lived experience." It is not just those with a university degree or teacher's certificate that have important knowledge to share.[57]
- Pay Elders and Knowledge Holders at equal value as those with university degrees and teacher's certificates.[58]
- Awaken respect for Indigenous Knowledge (IK). IK has not received the respect that is due as 'knowledge' or 'education.' The Socratic method of the west – having someone stand in front of a classroom and lecture – is not what many Indigenous Peoples think education is; Western ways of teaching need to be decolonized to respect Indigenous ways of learning.[59]

Recommendation 9: Offer professional development to address issues and advance the hard work of reconciliation through education.

Justice Murray Sinclair, Chief Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has said numerous times, "The truth is hard. Reconciliation is harder."[60] As discussed in a workshop hosted by the NCCIE Northwest Ontario region, one way to make progress toward reconciliation is by "moving forward through learning together."[61] This is no easy task. In the TRC final report (2015), the commissioners explain what this work entails (pp. 316-317):

> Reconciliation calls for federal, provincial, and territorial government action.
> Reconciliation calls for national action.
> The way we govern ourselves must change.

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[54] Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 25, 2020. NOTE:
[55] Leisa Desmoulins, personal communication. October 15, 2021.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Southwest Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 25, 2020.
[60] Retrieved October 17, 2021 from: https://uwaterloo.ca/human-rights-equity-inclusion/events/honourable-murray-sinclair-national-indigenous-history-month. See also: https://t-r-c.ca/s/reports/item/26; https://www.policyalternatives.ca/multimedia/senator-murray-sinclair-truth-hard-reconciliation-harder.
[61] NCCIE Regional Workshop Report for Northeastern Ontario, March 26, 2018.

Laws must change.
Policies and programs must change.
The way we educate our children and ourselves must change.
The way we do business must change.
Thinking must change.
The way we talk to, and about, each other must change.
All Canadians must make a firm and lasting commitment to reconciliation to ensure that Canada is a country where our children and grandchildren can thrive.

The TRC Calls to Action delineate these obligations in more detail with actions that promote the work of reconciliation in every sector of society (e.g., Calls to Action 1-5 – child welfare; 6-12 and 62-65 – education; 18-24 – health and medical; 25-42 and 50-52 – justice and legal sector; 57 - government and public service; 58-61, faith sector; 62-65 – education; 67 – museums; 84-86 – media; 87-91 – sports; 92 – business; and 93-94 – immigration).

The following discussion points focus on professional development needs in the education sector (see Call to Action 63).[62] Regional teams and community partners raised several suggestions for professional development to strengthen Indigenous education and education in general. However, other sectors can benefit from reflecting on how these issues apply to their professional development requirements as well. Professional development and training are needed to:

- Address systemic racism issues in post-secondary institutions;[63]
- Learn more about various topics, such as land acknowledgements and how to make them meaningful for the learning setting and age group, the history, knowledge, and realities of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, etc.;[64]
- Develop "professional competencies" as well as confidence in teaching lessons with Indigenous content, in observing cultural protocols of the Peoples who live in a school's region, in meeting people from Indigenous communities and organizations to make introductions and build relationships, and more;[65]
- Provide support for teachers in the development of their "professional growth plans" with respect to Indigenous education expectations and reconciliation;[66]
- Work with teachers in adapting their lessons to respect an Indigenous lens and infuse Indigenous content;[67]
- Inform post-secondary faculty and staff of Indigenous approaches, protocols, and practices in research;[68]

[62] To read the TRC Calls to Action, visit: https://www.irsss.ca/downloads/trc-calls-to-action.pdf.
[63] Québec Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 9, 2020.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Alberta Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.
[67] Southeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 16, 2020.
[68] Vancouver Island Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 23, 2020.

- Understand “reconciliation as moving forward through learning together” with an Indigenous perspective. This includes “ongoing Indigenous education development workshops for both teachers and students;”[69]
- Receive “trauma training” to understand triggers for Indigenous students better. “Trauma training is necessary for educators and community members to understand the impact of intergenerational trauma and the lateral violence that often results.”[70] “Trauma training” can be understood as learning about the trauma experienced by Indigenous Peoples, how to be sensitive to and respond to, in culturally appropriate ways, “the special needs of those affected by trauma” (Klinic Community Health Centre, 2013; p. 15), such as trauma experienced as a result of residential schools, 60’s scoop, intergenerational impacts, and other traumatic experiences inflicted upon and endured by Indigenous Peoples.

The need for ongoing professional development is also recognized in the 1972 policy paper with the following statements:

> If progress is going to be made in improving educational opportunity for native children, it is basic that teacher and counsellor training programs be redesigned to meet the needs. The need for native teachers and counselors is critical and urgent; the need for specially trained non-Indian teachers and counselors is also very great.[71]
>
> Native teachers and counselors who have an intimate understanding of Indian traditions, psychology, way of life and language, are best able to create the learning environment suited to the habits and interests of the Indian child. There is urgent need for more Indian counselors to work with students both on and off the reserves.[72]

Recommendation 10: Recognize the important role of Indigenous support workers in schools.

Recommendation 11: Address systemic racism with Indigenous education.

These two recommendations are presented together simply because of the narrative that became apparent through conversations with discussion participants.

Academic and guidance office supports for students are integral components of any K-12 and post-secondary school. For Indigenous students, more supports are often needed in addition to educators helping students graduate, such as cultural support workers, mental health workers, nutrition workers, physical activity coordinators, and

[69] NCCIE Regional Workshop Report for Northeastern Ontario, March 26, 2018.
[70] NCCIE Regional Workshop Report for Northwest Territories, February 21, 2018.
[71] Retrieved December 15, 2021 from: https://oneca.com/IndianControlofIndianEducation.pdf; page 18.
[72] Retrieved December 15, 2021 from: https://oneca.com/IndianControlofIndianEducation.pdf; page 18.

"around the clock workers to help support the youth in a wrap-around approach that centres on the learner's well-being."[73]

One story illustrating the need for "wrap-around" supports is shared by a participant who notes that, in her role in Indigenous student support services at her university, she often sees that when students do not finish school for whatever reason, when she sees them in the community, "They won't look at you; they feel shame." She observes, "

> We have so much work to do to try to ensure that they do not have that shame. Things happen . . . The process of your pathway isn't a linear one; there are lots of loops. You can step out for a while and take care of yourself and come back.[74]

The need for "wrap-around," culturally appropriate Indigenous student support services has been a recurring theme in discussions with NCCIE regional teams and community members. Participants have emphasized the importance of hiring and retaining Indigenous support workers – as well as Indigenous educators and language teachers – who approach their work in a holistic way supportive of students' emotional, spiritual, physical, and intellectual needs and well-being. In one such discussion, a participant acknowledged the difficulties hiring and retaining Indigenous people in these roles and how "there is something 'in the system' that is not embracing" the significance of these roles in the education of Indigenous students.[75] In a regional workshop, the point was made how important it is to hire Indigenous staff and teachers "within the education system [who] can work together as part of a supportive 'nest' of Indigenous Peoples and knowledges, and that Indigenous educators need to be supported in this holistic approach to their work.[76] Systemic racism was discussed during one conversation and these thoughts were shared regarding one way to address it:

> We can't talk about best practices in Indigenous education within non-Indigenous institutions, schools, colleges, or universities without talking about systemic racism. . . [To address this issue], it's not just about having an Indigenous principal that values [an Indigenous] way of being as a way of teaching. . . We have focused on these strengths that Indigenous education has, but we are suggesting introducing these strengths and building these networks in, many cases, hostile environments. . . There is a push to do Indigenous education completely outside non-Indigenous contexts [yet that will not solve the issues or move us toward reconciliation within educational systems]. Strangely enough, you can address systemic racism through Indigenous education. If you think about all the things we are talking about – in terms of building respectful relationships and communities, *that does* address systemic racism – or it can.[77]

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[73] Retrieved from: https://www.nccie.ca/story/matawa-learning-centre/.

[74] Vancouver Island Zoom Discussion, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nove. 23, 2020.

[75] Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 25, 2020.

[76] NCCIE Regional Workshop Report for Northeastern Ontario, March 26, 2018.

[77] Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 25, 2020.

These comments are reinforced by Justice Murray Sinclair's remarks in a January 2021 interview where he stated,

> If you get rid of all of the racists in all of the positions of government, policing, justice, health — you will still have a problem. Because you will have a system that is functioning based upon policies, priorities and decisions that direct how things are to be done, that come from a time when racism was very blatant.[78]

Add Canada's educational system to this list of social sectors. When the TRC final report was first published in 2015, Justice Sinclair observed,

> Education is what got us into this mess . . . but education is the key to reconciliation . . . We need to look at the way we are educating children. That's why we say that this is not an aboriginal problem. It's a Canadian problem."[79]

Making reforms to address systemic racism in Canada's education system involves looking "at the way we are educating children" – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, making sure the supports are there from a holistic perspective for both students and educators – and as the one individual noted, one way to do this is through Indigenous education and "building respectful relationships and communities."

Recommendation 12: Strong foundations are needed for educators to become comfortable when teaching Indigenous content with an Indigenous lens. Pre-service and in-service teacher training in Indigenous education is consequentially important.

This recommendation was another common discussion point raised in many of the conversations contributing to this report as well as regional workshops and national gatherings. The main message is that the colonial approach taught in teacher education programs needs to change to be more inclusive of Indigenous knowledges and ways of learning (see also Archibald et al, 2010). One group raised the question, how can we teach differently, given that schools are themselves products of colonization?[80] They press that teacher education programs for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teacher candidates need to change because they "do not want to see another generation of teacher candidates doing the same thing."[81] Put another way, a teacher in the group asks, "How do we become a part of 'truth and reconciliation'? . . . Those Calls to Action

[78] Retrieved September 15, 2021 from: https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-jan-27-2021-1.5888592/sen-murray-sinclair-urges-canadians-to-reckon-with-systemic-racism-1.5888597.
[79] Retrieved September 15, 2021 from: https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/truth-and-reconciliation-chair-urges-canada-to-adopt-un-declaration-on-indigenous-peoples-1.3096225.
[80] Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.
[81] Ibid.

say that all teachers should be taught [these] things."[82] A Faculty of Education professor comments:

> Teacher education programs need to change. We can't be graduating people with B. Ed degrees going out doing the same darn thing they've lived through in their K-12 experience and expect that they are going to something different. Even if [Indigenous students in the teacher education program] have knowledge of their own communities and their own cultures, the default is going to be to teach it in a very colonial way. What I advocate for is, if we want people to be doing something different, then we have to give them the space, opportunities, the experience, but also the education to do something different . . . We need to graduate people who think differently, who can do things differently.[83]

Challenges related to this recommendation – "to give teacher candidates foundational knowledge and skills to go about educating in a different way"[84] – include, for example:

- How to define and go about "curriculum development" differently
- How to overcome the belief that "Indigenous education is about pieces of information about Indigenous People" – that it can be compartmentalized in a certain set of subjects (such as Cultural Studies, Social Studies, History, etc.), when "really it is imbued in all of life, so all subjects should include a unit that looks at the subject with an Indigenous lens"[85]
- Relatedly, how to resist the tendency to pigeonhole Indigenous education and Indigenous knowledges into only Environmental Studies, Environmental Sciences, or Social Justice programs when Indigenous education is a subject unto itself that transcends any one subject[86]
- Once able to deliver a different kind of education to teacher candidates, so they can do things differently, "we are putting them into institutions that are huge that have their own life and asking them to do something different. How do we have [the institution of] education structured? Who is working to take that apart, change it, and challenge it?[87]
- Governments, policymakers, and schools need to be held accountable so that the Calls to Action are implemented and fundamental changes in teacher education programs are made.[88]

[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Northwest Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 17, 2020.
[87] Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.
[88] Ibid.

One teacher concludes:

> We don't want to see another generation going through a colonial education system. When they graduate with a B. Ed., at least they are going to go into the classroom with some good foundational knowledge of how to do it differently. Of course, they'll have colonial textbooks. But they'll have tools and some knowledge/skills to go about educating in a different way. They can push those envelopes and boundaries. I will fulfill provincial curriculum requirements, but I know how to fulfill them in a way that hasn't historically been done before in a classroom. I will do those things that are mandated in my contract, but I will do them differently.[89]

The 1972 policy paper also acknowledges this important requirement, asserting:

> Federal and provincial/territorial authorities are urged to use the strongest measures necessary to improve the qualifications of teachers and counselors of Indian children . . . Orientation courses and in-service training are needed in all regions. Assistance should be available for teachers in adapting curriculum and teaching techniques to the needs of local children.[90]

In summary, the recommendations in this western direction build on a common understanding of Indigenous education from an Indigenous perspective (presented in the eastern direction) and the many relationships that contribute to students' learning journeys (presented in the southern direction). The recommendations in the western direction focus on the diverse array of supports needed for students, Knowledge Holders, and Elders as well as non-Indigenous and Indigenous teachers and pre-service teachers. They shine a light on the hard work and change that needs to occur in educational systems to advance reconciliation efforts, awakening hearts and minds toward a better appreciation for Indigenous education, more confidence in teaching Indigenous content, and expanding opportunities for student growth and success.

The North – Recommendations for Transforming Education

With the teachings in the northern direction connected to movement and change – imagine the wind blowing through fields of grass and leaves on trees – the themes in this set of recommendations relate to changes in teaching methods and transforming educational systems by enriching them with Indigenous ways of knowing and learning. Sandy Grande (2015), in her book *Red Pedagogy,* describes this transformative change, explaining:

> It is not only imperative for Indian educators to insist on the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and praxis in schools but also to transform the

[89] Ibid.

[90] Retrieved December 15, 2021 from: https://oneca.com/IndianControlofIndianEducation.pdf; page 19.

> institutional structures of schools themselves. In other words, in addition to the development of Native curricula, indigenous educators need to develop systems of analysis that help theorize the ways in which power and domination inform the processes and procedures of schooling. They need pedagogies that work to disrupt the structures of inequality (pp. 5-6).

In these remarks, Sandy Grande places the onus of change on Indigenous educators. However, in this age of reconciliation, the "hard work" for change needs to be the responsibility of Indigenous *and* non-Indigenous actors alike – educators, administrators, governments, boards, families, communities, *and* students. In other words, this report envisions transformative change by all actors to strengthen Indigenous education and education *for all* by reframing what is being taught and how. In addition, it means evolving and rebalancing administrative power structures and support services so that schools become exemplars for modeling behaviour in their "processes and procedures of schooling," reforming Eurocentric, colonial approaches to education with the gifts inherent in Indigenous ways of knowing and learning.

Marie Battiste (2013), in her book *Decolonizing Education,* describes this transformative change in education, asserting:

> . . . it is not just in First Nations education that transformation will occur, but in the education of Canadians at large. . . Out-dated policies must be reconciled and new partnerships established to revitalize Aboriginal people, languages, and cultures. For every educator, our responsibility is making a commitment to both unlearn and learn — to unlearn racism and superiority in all its manifestations, while examining our own social constructions in our judgements and learn new ways of knowing, valuing others, accepting diversity, and making equity and inclusion foundations for all learners. As Parker Palmer (1980) suggests, "we don't think our way into a new kind of living; we live our way into a new kind of thinking" (p. 188). (p. 166).

With these Indigenous scholars' visions for transformative change in education, the following recommendations build on those presented in the eastern, southern, and western directions, beginning with the premise of Indigenous control of Indigenous education and what this foundational principle might look like in school and community settings. Then, recommendations are presented for evolving education practice in mainstream settings – from early childhood to adult learning – and how transforming education from an Indigenous perspective can enrich learning for all.

Recommendation 13: Expand Indigenous control of Indigenous education

One of the major threads in the discussions contributing to this report was continued advocacy for Indigenous control of Indigenous education. This takes on different meanings depending upon where one is in the country. In Nunavut, for example, education was once decentralized with local control distributed among "District

Education Authorities" (DEAs) that used to be in every community. Now, DEAs are treated increasingly as advisory structures and approvals for program and curricular initiatives are granted by the bureaucracy, which is what educators call the territorial government. While it seems counterintuitive that the Inuit territorial government has become a western-style bureaucracy, local educators are expressing growing frustration over the reduced agency of DEAs and increased red tape, which has, for example, led to decisions to standardize the Inuktut language, reducing several dialects down to one and focusing on reading and writing rather than conversation fluency.[91]

Elsewhere in Canada, another approach to strengthening "Indigenous control of Indigenous education" is intentionally working toward increased involvement of Indigenous communities in mainstream schools. For example, in northeastern Ontario, the discussion turned to one of the schools in the region that had hired a principal who is closely allied with neighbouring Indigenous communities.[92] As a result, the school involves people from local First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in its programming and curricular decisions. Not every school enjoys this degree of support for increasing the presence of Indigenous culture and ways of knowing and learning. For example, Indigenous communities may not be in a position to (or may not want to) extend a hand to get involved because they may be already stretched in terms of capacity. For the sake of Indigenous students in provincially-run schools – and for the greater goals of truth and reconciliation in education for all students, changes must be made to increase Indigenous control of and involvement in Indigenous education in urban and rural schools and communities.

Indeed, some of the comments in discussions for this paper relate to "forming our own house," meaning opening First Nations, Métis, and Inuit-run schools. For example, one participant recalls her interview with Dr. Alan Corbiere. She recalls that he spoke about how universities and schools have their own buildings, so we must follow their rules. She paraphrases Dr. Corbiere, saying: "When you go into a lodge, you have to respect those ways. We need to form our own house. We need to take back control and power and not leave it to provincial governments."[93] While an important initiative for those who can afford it, the scope is wider when considering both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Why not have Indigenous-run schools *and* re-align public (and private) schools so that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can benefit from an education that is inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing and learning?

Pursuing 'Indigenous control of Indigenous education' and the various degrees to which this is actualized, is essential now because, as people noted in conversations leading

[91] Nunavut Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 1, 2020.
[92] Northeastern Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 25, 2020. Also, see: https://www.nccie.ca/story/indigenous-education-at-st-davids-public-school/ and https://www.nccie.ca/lessonplan/indigenous-education-in-a-catholic-school-setting-a-case-study-on-best-practices-in-indigenization-in-a-k-to-6-primary-school-setting-st-david-catholic-elementary-school/.
[93] As paraphrased from Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020. For interviews with Dr. Alan Corbiere, visit: https://www.nccie.ca/story/everyone-learns-differently/ and https://www.nccie.ca/story/anishinaabe-education-is-a-life-long-journey/.

up to this report, time is of the essence and "they are tired of waiting." One person asks, "What's really changed from 20 years ago?"[94] The current system is not working *for* Indigenous Peoples, he says, referring to the upending of programs with every change of government. He notes, "Every four years, it seems, you are dealing with all new people in the government. How do you get anything accomplished?"[95] Consider what happened with Ontario's Indigenous Education Strategy developed by the Wynne government. When Doug Ford was elected as Premier, the strategy was scrapped immediately. Further back in time, when Mike Harris was the Ontario Premier, he eliminated the Ministry of Education's Anti-Racism, Equity and Access Division, which also turned back the clock for Indigenous students in the province.[96] With such constant turnover, the little progress that may have been made is often lost. "The system is set up for failure," is one of the comments heard loud and clear.[97]

This same sentiment is present elsewhere in the country, too. For example, the conversation on the east coast turned to the long time horizon needed to effect change within a provincial system. In Newfoundland, for instance, a process has been underway to engage with Indigenous Peoples to set up an Indigenous education framework. The duration of this process is expected to be seven to ten years, which as one individual notes, is too drawn out. "If we start with some of the documents right now," she comments, "then – ok, we might impact change in a couple courses within the next five years – *possibly* – the ones that are up for renewal. It is a long haul! Huge foundational shifts need to happen so change can be made faster than seven to ten years." She compares what is happening in Newfoundland to BC, noting:

> That's kind of what happened in BC . . . Some huge foundational shifts happened . . . I spoke to someone a few days ago . . . They don't have it all under control just yet, but definitely, their whole curriculum has shifted to Indigenous ways of knowing and being. So, we are seeing it in other provinces. The timelines that we are on in this province aren't going to impact huge change immediately.[98]

Someone from Nova Scotia echoes this sentiment, reflecting,

> At the end of the day, sadly, my experience has been colonizers are very good at creating detours and sidetracks so that the agenda gets shifted and changed, and things don't get done. Deadlines get missed 'accidentally' . . . If you look at history, it's been pretty consistent on how they demobilize and how things are gone.[99]

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[94] Southwest Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Teachings and Learnings. November 25, 2020.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Carol Campbell (2020): Educational equity in Canada: the case of Ontario's strategies and actions to advance excellence and equity for students, School Leadership & Management, DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2019.1709165. Retrieved September 22, 2021 from: https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1709165
[97] Southwest Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Teachings and Learnings. November 25, 2020.
[98] Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.
[99] Ibid.

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples are tired of waiting. They want control of their children's education now. As noted throughout this report, this vision dates back to the 1972 policy paper (if not before). Where possible, Indigenous Peoples prefer to form their own houses of learning. Where they have to work within provincial systems, they want to be integrally involved so their children *see* their culture in every aspect of their places of learning – from student support services, to what and how curriculum is taught, to the smell and feel of the place. And in this era of reconciliation, with the TRC Calls to Action demanding change, Indigenous education's holistic and relational approach has much to offer all learners of all ages and backgrounds, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

Recommendation 14: Support traditional ways of child-rearing in education practice.

Recommendation 15: Every Indigenous child and family should have access to Indigenous-led, culturally-specific early childhood education programs.

These two recommendations are presented together because they overlap. Both Elders of kêhtê-ayak, the Elders' Council at FNUniv, and individuals participating in the regional discussions shared remarks and insights that touched upon both. With respect to the value of traditional ways of child-rearing, and the potential for adopting similar approaches today in early childhood programs, one individual described a traditional way of child-rearing and education – how Aunties and Grandmothers watched over the children from a very early age and observed each one to identify their inherent gifts and the way(s) in which each child learns best. These gifts were nurtured over the years by identifying who in the community each child should spend time with to learn and develop those gifts, so knowledge and skills are passed on from generation to generation. He suggests that this approach to teaching, where one teacher follows with a group of children for several years, ought to be promoted.[100]

One of the Elders of kêhtê-ayak illustrates that this approach is still practiced today, pointing to the Blackfoot People's Chickadee Society. Here, children are linked with old people from a very early age where "they are already training five-year olds to be Elders, not [just] good, little children, to build up their cultural forest." He continues to explain how oskâpêwis (helpers, apprentices) learn from their Elder(s) who learned from their Elder(s) who learned from their Elder(s), etc. As children grow and learn, there is a progression of knowledge that is transferred and who teaches what to whom at what age.[101]

Turning to recommendation 15, Some variation of this approach could potentially be incorporated into early childhood education programs. Patsy McKinney, in her interview with NCCIE, talks about how important it is for education to be delivered "by us" and in addition to the benefit of passing on important cultural knowledge, as discussed above,

[100] Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.

[101] kêhtê-ayak Elders, personal communication. kêhtê-ayak Elders Council meeting. First Nations University of Canada, September 10, 2021.

she adds, “We know, for instance, that the Maliseet language is on the brink of extinction. That’s important to us, so we focus on language. If it’s in the mainstream program, probably not. They’d be focusing on French [only].”[102]

The program for which Patsy McKinney is the Executive Director is called “Under One Sky” and is an Aboriginal Head Start program. She emphasizes, “

> Every community that has a significant population should have a Head Start program, because these are the most significant years in a child’s life. They’re called the formative years, so whatever we do now really makes a difference. We know that there is not a darn thing that we can do to change anything that happened in the past. But we can do a lot right now for these children and their families.

When taught “by us,” she points to the importance of “Connecting us with who we really are – and who we really are is in the language – and then getting folks out on the land and connected to the land, because that was really our first and original educator, Mother Earth.”[103] Mainstream programs do not offer this type of culturally-specific programming.

Recommendation 16: Transform education, educational spaces, and classroom experiences to provide an education that “teaches what it is to be a human,” dedicating time and space for all students to learn from Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Recommendation 17: Support land-based programs with ongoing access to language and culture, including tailoring them for younger children.

These two recommendations follow on previous remarks. Virtually all conversations touched upon the importance of land-based learning and strengthening and reclaiming languages. Someone from Nunavut, for example, recommends partnering with community-based programs to strengthen both language and culture. She comments that most programs are currently tailored for youth and adults and would like to see more programming tailored for young children, especially to develop their conversational skills in Inuktitut, rather than solely on reading and writing.[104]

Elders stress the importance of passing on cultural knowledge in schools, in communities, as well as in culture camps with land-based learning. Seeing as we live on Turtle Island, they would like to see all schools – in all provinces and territories – incorporate time and space in the curriculum for students – both Indigenous and non-

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[102] Retrieved September 24, 2021 from: https://www.nccie.ca/story/take-it-outside-program-under-one-sky-friendship-centre-head-start-program-patsy-mckinney-executive-director-fredericton-new-brunswick/. Also, see: https://www.nccie.ca/story/under-one-sky-friendship-centre-head-start-program-patsy-mckinney-executive-director/.

[103] Retrieved September 24, 2021 from: https://www.nccie.ca/videos/indigenous-education-community-insights-and-introspections/.

[104] Nunavut Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 1, 2020.

Indigenous – to learn about the cultural knowledge of this land. There is so much important knowledge to pass on, the Elders say; knowledge that is for everyone. For example, there is important knowledge to learn about the seasons. With each "changeover," ceremonies take place. Students' education can be enriched by learning about them and even experiencing some of these ceremonies.[105] There is also important knowledge to learn about medicines – where to find them, when to gather them, how to prepare them, and how, for example, medicines are gathered at different times of the year for different ages. That is, the Elders explain, medicines for the young are gathered when the plants are young; medicines for older people are gathered later in the year. They cannot stress enough how important it is to pass on medicine knowledge connected to the land where one lives.[106]

Creating a space in one's school to invite Elders and Knowledge Holders regularly will enhance students' growth as human beings and enrich their education in vital ways. The Elders talk about the importance of creating these spaces for many purposes – to teach about and even share in ceremonies, to tell stories and pass on teachings, to learn about medicines, and to explain and practice important protocols with smudging and offering tobacco (or, if not tobacco, other culture-specific practices when making offerings and giving thanks).

These remarks echo earlier remarks from Willie Ermine at the beginning of this paper – that there is a school education and a spiritual education. He says, for example when reflecting on the seasons, "Knowledge about the seasons is a spiritual matter. It's not a mental, academic exercise . . . It is dangerous to practice 'all in the mind' . . ." Having both a teaching background and a spiritual background, he finds that where the two connect is "sometimes fuzzy." He says, "It's hard to give justice to this idea of education as fuzzy," because he cannot separate a person's mind from one's spirit. Both are intrinsically connected and attention to both is integral to growth and development as a human being. This point harkens back to the earlier discussion with the feather – Just as it is impossible for a bird to fly with only one half of each feather, so, too, human beings need to attend to a whole education that nurtures their mind, body, *and* spirit. Transforming education, educational spaces, and classroom experiences to provide an education that "teaches what it is to be a human" from an Indigenous perspective "disrupts our mind [about] what is education," Willie Ermine says.[107]

Finally, as noted earlier, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students have varied learning styles – spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical. They can benefit from dedicating time and space to learning according to Indigenous ways of knowing and being, to learning "what it is to be a human." The holistic approach of Indigenous education places students at the centre of learning, acknowledging these multiple ways students learn with a focus on "learning through doing" and time for reflection, among

[105] kêhtê-ayak Elders, personal communication. kêhtê-ayak Elders Council meeting. First Nations University of Canada, September 10, 2021; Zoom discussion, September 27, 2021.
[106] Ibid.
[107] kêhtê-ayak Elders, personal communication. kêhtê-ayak Elders Council meeting, First Nations University of Canada, September 10, 2021.

other teaching tools. Dedicating time and space to Indigenous education, to balance the Western education they are receiving, will increase the ways in which students connect with and want to learn, creating an inclusive space where gifts are nurtured, and students thrive.

As for recommendation 17, spending time on-the-land and learning from the land are central tenets of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. It is connected to Recommendation 16 because mainstream education in schools can benefit from intentionally dedicating time for land-based learning guided by Indigenous peoples. Spending time on-the-land combined with time for reflection can further one's growth, learning "what it is to be a human." Returning to one of the first quotes in this paper, Isaac Murdoch observes,

> Our education comes from the land, and it also comes from the spirits, the clouds, the stars. I believe Indigenous education is deeply rooted in the spiritual fabric of this land and of course the spirit world. . . Indigenous education has a role in trying to shape humanity for us to be the best that we can be . . . The Elders have the answers to how to live on earth . . . It's really important to immerse our young children in the language and on the land. We need to produce climate leaders. And those are going to be the ones who can speak the language, that know the bush like the back of their hand, that can read stars, that know the ecological blueprint on how to live on earth. Indigenous education from the land is so critical right now . . . We have to get out of the classrooms and into the bush.[108]

Recommendations 4 and 5 have already provided insight into the importance of spending time learning on-the-land and how Indigenous languages are integrally connected with the lands from which they originate, so the two cannot be separated. Recommendation 16 may seem repetitive of these earlier recommendations, but it includes a focus on ensuring land-based learning begins at a young age, which is in response to specific comments about the importance of children spending time on-the-land when they are very young to build a strong relationship with "the land."[109]

Recommendation 18: Strengthen opportunities to become "code switchers" – those who can walk in both worlds – Indigenous and Western – in culturally good ways.

This recommendation reflects upon another facet of the above discussion. During the project and conversations for this paper, the idea of being able to walk in both worlds arose numerous times. One individual describes this type of person as a "code switcher," an adaptation of the phrase "code talker," which can be understood as

[108] Isaac Murdoch – Connecting to Land. Retrieved October 18, 2021 from: https://www.nccie.ca/story/connecting-to-land/.

[109] Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.

someone who comprehends two different worldviews and is trusted to be able to live in both worlds with knowledge, respect, and humility.[110]

As chronicled in numerous sources, including RCAP (RCAP, 1996) and TRC (TRC, 2015), Indigenous Peoples have been subjected to colonization to learn the ways of the Western worldview. They have been forcefully disconnected from their People's ways, their lands, cultures, and languages. The abuse and oppression they have endured have impacted the health and well-being of multiple generations; languages and dialects have become endangered or extinct; cultural knowledge has been lost.

After many decades of hardship, today, Indigenous students increasingly are finding their ways out of a morass of abuse and depression and are realizing success in their education and careers. However, too many are still struggling; hence, the need for the changes and recommendations presented in this paper to strengthen Indigenous education from the holistic perspective of all four directions in this report.

Despite ongoing challenges, a growing number of Indigenous students walk confidently in both worlds. For those who have rediscovered and reconnected with their spiritual and cultural ways, they have become "code switchers." First Nations, Métis, and Inuit "code switchers" are proud of their heritages and have reconnected with their roots. They have learned the laws and ways of the colonized worldview. More significantly, they are once again learning with their Elders and Knowledge Holders to connect with *their* natural laws and ways of knowing that are grounded in Creation and learned through ceremonies. They are strengthening their People's knowledge to be carried forth to future generations. Implementing Recommendations 16 and 17, balancing a Western education with dedicated time and space for *all* students to learn "what it is to be a human" according to Indigenous ways of knowing and being will create more "code switchers." For Indigenous Peoples to know how to walk in both worlds, keeping their spirituality and cultures strong, not only will benefit themselves, their families, and their communities, but also will have untold benefits for Canada as a whole.[111]
Non-Indigenous learners can become "code switchers" as well. Many of the recommendations in this report apply to education for *all* students, so that in this age of reconciliation, educational systems evolve for *all* learners so they can benefit from an Indigenous education in balance with a Western education.

In the 1972 policy paper, "Indian Control of Indian Education," the authors tagged this as "integration:"

> Integration is a broad concept of human development which provides for growth through mingling the best elements of a wide range of human differences. Integrated educational programs must respect the reality of

[110] Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 25, 2020.
[111] Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 25, 2020. Also, see interview with Carol Anne Hilton at: https://thefutureeconomy.ca/interviews/carol-anne-hilton/.
[111] kêhtê-ayak Elders, personal communication. kêhtê-ayak Elders Council meeting. First Nations University of Canada, September 10, 2021.

> racial and cultural differences by providing a curriculum which blends the best from the Indian and the non-Indian traditions. Integration viewed as a one-way process is not integration and will fail. In the past, it has been the Indian student who was asked to integrate: to give up his identity, to adopt new values and a new way of life. This restricted interpretation of integration must be radically altered if future education programs are to benefit Indian children.[112]

One final note needs to be reinforced when exploring the different levels of learning required to become a "code-switcher." While places of learning are encouraged to involve Elders and Knowledge Holders in the education of their students – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, it is understood that certain Indigenous knowledge can only be shared through ceremonies and gaining entry to ceremonies requires a dedication of time and energy following cultural protocols. The point here is that any student can begin their learning journey by spending time with and listening to Elders and Knowledge Holders in school settings and, importantly, with time spent on-the-land. Learning "what it is to be a human" through Indigenous ways of knowing and being that is in balance with a Western education can yield a new generation of citizens free from racism and full of mutual respect. Is that not a worthy vision for *all* our children's education?

Recommendation 19: Search for and digitize recordings that remain in analog form.

When speaking with a few Elders of kêhtê-ayak, the Elders Council at First Nations University of Canada, the topic arose concerning the existence of audio recordings on cassette or reel-to-reel tapes and other analog media.[113] These tapes record Elders and Knowledge Holders speaking their languages and/or sharing important cultural knowledge. To this day they remain in analog form; the information is at risk of becoming lost as the tapes' quality may degrade over time.

NCCIE first became aware of this issue in 2017 when starting a collaboration between FNUniv and Johnson Shoyama Graduate School for Public Policy. In 2010, FNUniv students had interviewed several Knowledge Holders for a project on Indigenous governance; these interviews were recorded on 8 mm film. NCCIE spent approximately two years digitizing, translating Cree, Saulteaux, and Dakota interviews, subtitling, and preparing final versions of the new digital recordings for the website. Today, these recordings are available on NCCIE.CA in the Knowledge Space.

This issue arose again in 2018 in conversation with a Knowledge Holder who, at one time, had been employed with the Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC). She recalled coming across several tape recordings in the PAGC basement, just sitting there collecting dust and at risk of becoming degraded beyond repair.[114]

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[112] Retrieved December 16, 2021 from: https://oneca.com/IndianControlofIndianEducation.pdf; page 26.

[113] kêhtê-ayak Elders, personal communication. Saskatoon Campus Zoom Discussion. First Nations University of Canada, September 27, 2021.

[114] Linda McNab, personal communication. July 5, 2018.

Other communities may have similar caches of recordings. So as not to lose this oral knowledge, it is recommended that funds be dedicated to a national project in support of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in their searches for these recordings. They need to be catalogued and digitized, safeguarding their availability for the People whose knowledge has been recorded. Such a project will ensure that the oral knowledge and the languages and dialects are preserved and accessible for generations to come.

Recommendation 20: Revisiting Recommendation #1: Be mindful of the diversity among Indigenous Peoples.

Whereas recommendation #1 is framed within the context of policymaking, this recommendation focuses on teaching practices and respectful regard for the diversity of Indigenous Peoples across Canada. Elders talked about their concerns for educators to acknowledge that Indigenous knowledge is not one-size-fits-all. What is understood from an Anishinaabe perspective, for example, may not be true to every culture, one Elder says. Educators – whether they are teachers (non-Indigenous or Indigenous) or Elders or Knowledge Holders invited into a classroom – need to remember the diversity between and among cultures and to be respectful of different ways of doing things. She wants educators to know that when teaching students one way, students may assume that it is the way for everyone unless they are reminded that it is one perspective that they are learning and that there are many perspectives – some similar, some different. "They may come away thinking that the one way they learned is the only way, and it's not."[115]

Extending these sentiments to the curriculum that is being taught in different places around the country, one person notes his concern for "how unlocalized curriculum is" and how what is being taught in classrooms is, more often than not, "pan-Indian and a homogenized collection of stories." He goes on to say, "In terms of policy development, it would be grand if local school boards could be more intentional about the curriculum they are presenting."[116] Using "Land Acknowledgements" as an example, he states,

> The same could be said about territory acknowledgements. They try and name everyone from thousands of kilometres away, sometimes. People can be a little more specific about where they are. And if they are unsure, figure out whose trapline used to run through their, enquote, "property", right? It's that family who will basically be evidence of whose territory you are in. It doesn't seem like organizations or school boards are really willing to do that work – to find out exactly whose trapline this was before. You really need to go down that deep if you're naming two, three, four different Nations in your community.[117]

[115] kêhtê-ayak Elders, personal communication. Saskatoon Campus Zoom Discussion. First Nations University of Canada, September 27, 2021.
[116] Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. Nov. 25, 2020.
[117] Ibid.

As another example to illustrate his point he recommends, rather than resorting to the term “First Nation,” find out the name of the People you are talking about, such as Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, Nehiyawak, Haida, Inuit, etc.[118]

At the core of his comments, though, is the necessity and obligation for curriculum to reflect the People(s) in whose territory a school is situated.

Also reflecting on the diversity among Indigenous Peoples, one Elder shares her wish for educators to be sensitive to the diverse needs and backgrounds of their Indigenous students. “It is important,” she says, “to really listen what the youngsters are saying.” She has dealt with injured youth who want to learn about their culture. But then they may get spoken down to by an Elder or someone else, and she says that “it feels like getting your hand slapped. It hurts.” Elders with whom she learned set an example of how to be kind and compassionate. She was asked, “What does it feel like inside?” Echoing the Elder above, she encourages teachers to approach “mistakes” with a different perspective, saying, “There is no such thing as a mistake. It is an opportunity for learning.” For example, Elders knowledgeable of their cultural ways need to be sensitive to the fact that other Peoples may have different ways, and that these differences are not wrong; they are not “mistakes.” They are just different. She encourages educators to teach in a way “that they [the students] will want to ask more questions, in a way that they will keep on coming back to learn more.”[119]

Another Elder reflects on these comments, sharing a bit about the education he received. He was encouraged to learn different ways of doing ceremonies in different places and was told “to have an open mind and respect the way they do things.”[120] Even though they may be different from how he was taught, he says, respect their way and learn from their way. “Respect their ways of doing. In return, they will welcome you to come visit and learn from them.” When he was learning as a youth, he learned from ceremonial Elders about the Sundance ceremony, for example. He learned about the number of pipes, the songs, the structure. In different places, he learned that these are often different. “Not wrong; just different,” he says. “As an oskâpêwis [a helper, apprentice], you are taught to have an open mind, to have respect that it might be different. When they come to our territory,” he says, “they will reciprocate with respect of how we do things here.”[121] This example illustrates a benefit of learning different ways, with the intention of expanding one’s thinking about the differences between Western ways and Indigenous ways of knowing and being – the realization that having respect for more than one way of doing things leads to harmony among Peoples.

In summary, the recommendations presented in the northern direction build on those in the eastern, southern, and western directions, offering a vision for transforming

[118] Ibid.

[119] kêhtê-ayak Elders, personal communication. kêhtê-ayak Elders Council meeting. First Nations University of Canada, September 10, 2021.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid.

education and strengthening Indigenous education from an Indigenous perspective. The section began with the premise of Indigenous control of Indigenous education and what this foundational principle can look like in school and community settings. All the recommendations presented aim to evolve education practice in mainstream settings – to enhance classroom and on-the-land learning, rebalancing Western educational systems with due respect for Indigenous education to enrich learning for all.

Conclusion – On Transformative Change in Education

As stated in the 1972 policy paper,

> "Non-Indians must be ready to recognize the value of another way of life; to learn about Indian history, customs and language; and to modify, if necessary, some of their own ideas and practices."[122]

The recommendations in this paper present important changes for strengthening Indigenous education and transforming education in general, rebalancing the education students receive to give due respect to Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Indigenous education, when approached holistically as described in the eastern direction, is for everyone's benefit. However, the transformative recommendations for pursuing respectful relationships, evolving and strengthening administrative and support systems, and advancing teaching practices are key for the success of Indigenous students, without which the benefits to others are for naught. As former National Chief Perry Bellegarde has stated, "When First Nations succeed, Canada succeeds." [123] So, the success of Indigenous Peoples is integrally linked with the success of Canada as a whole.

A dialogue from one of the many conversations for this paper sums up best the need for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to pursue transformative change in education:

> There's . . . the challenge, though, that colonial education systems and institutions have been around for a very long time. They've embedded and imbued knowledge systems, ways of understanding the world, very successfully as part of their colonial efforts to assimilate, acculturate, deny, erase Indigenous People. And those are very intentional forms of . . . colonial education that continue to impact . . . many Indigenous Peoples today. I can't speak for People broadly, but I can certainly speak for our People. And so in addition to . . . efforts to revitalize and ensure that youth perspectives and land-based knowledge and learning opportunities are reflected in the curriculum, it's equally as important to work with partners and others who are trained and are able to become valued allies and committed to reforming and transforming the very fundamental and

[122] Retrieved December 16, 2021 from: https://oneca.com/IndianControlofIndianEducation.pdf; page 26.
[123] See for example: Bellegarde, P. (July 17, 2019). "First Nations' priorities are Canada's priorities." The Hill Times.

> foundational knowledge that exists that are found to be inaccurate, that are founded in lies, that are founded in that very sovereign sort of space that Canada occupies.
>
> Because those too . . . I'll be blunt, they can't necessarily be transformed by our own forms of land-based knowledge in and of themselves without stated efforts and intents to acknowledge that there are fundamental mistruths and lies with a stated purpose and to do something about them. So, there are other things going on at work here . . . about how do we work better with our provincial institutions and others to make change.
>
> But there has been an effort to actually decolonize and redress, you know, systemic discriminatory and racist education systems, many of which you know a lot of us work within. So yeah, that's kind of where I'm at with education broadly. There's a lot going on. I feel like sometimes that it's very easy for education to become marginal to a conversation. And I find that so - even for me in my work over the years and not because I undervalue the power of education, but it just becomes so easy sometimes for education to become a side task or done at the side of someone's desk, when really education is fundamentally everything, when really it's the only thing that is going to transform our societies and our future. . .[124]

Another person agrees, noting, "When you said 'education is everything' – it's the only thing that can make change. Absolutely. I just think about Nova Scotia and the recent . . . struggles.[125] And if people were adequately taught treaty history, would what had happened even happened? Probably not. So, it's all about education; it really is."[126]

The conversation then turned to how to effect the changes they are describing and that are detailed in this report. They discussed combining grassroots approaches with a national-level approach with nationally-recognized organizations, such as NCCIE and First Nations University of Canada. In relation to an ongoing initiative to develop an Indigenous education policy framework in Nova Scotia, one person observes, "That group is just not working, not moving, not mobilizing. We've managed to work together to develop a draft Indigenous education policy framework. Okay, where is that? Why can't we move that forward? Why can't we challenge the government and their institutions? The time is now. We are calling on you to address the TRC and the MMIWG and all those things and we are able and willing to work with you."[127]

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[124] Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.
[125] This comment is in reference to the lobster dispute between Nova Scotians and Mi'kmaq that began in 2020. See: https://www.rcinet.ca/en/2021/05/03/nova-scotia-lobster-dispute-new-year-new-dispute/.
[126] Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.
[127] Ibid.

Another participant responds:

> This is a prime opportunity to push that agenda . . . I know this from experience. You can mobilize grassroots all you want. But if you don't have a way to be in there right at the table when they're making decisions, [decisions] come with other national, organizational academics pushing. When I look at things that I've seen make government react, I don't want to have to shut things down for them to listen to us on the ground. Honestly, there's not much else that they listen to. It's amazing to me that an open letter can come from a couple hundred academics, and something shakes. Then all of a sudden, [government] needs to address this or answer to this. At the end of the day, sadly, my experience has been colonizers are very good at creating detours and sidetracks so that the agenda gets shifted and changed, and things don't get done. Deadlines get missed accidentally or . . . If you look at history, it's been pretty consistent on how they demobilize and how things are gone. Just look at the Nova Scotia piece of it . . . Good intentions don't get changes, that's just the reality.[128]

They call on national organizations, such as NCCIE, First Nations University of Canada, and other academic or Indigenous organizations, to take a leadership role, and along with grassroots efforts, push Indigenous education agendas forward to fruition, to realize the transformative changes that are needed. They also emphasize the continued obligation of federal and provincial/territorial governments to provide equitable funding for these changes across all Canada's education systems, something also pushed for in the 1972 policy paper:

> While we assert that only Indian people can develop a suitable philosophy of education based on Indian values adapted to modern living, we also strongly maintain that it is the financial responsibility of the Federal Government to provide education of all types and all levels to all status Indian people, whether living on or off reserves.[129]

The Indigenous education policy framework referred to earlier is just one example of the hard work being done in areas across the country that need to advance and be implemented. As well, the recommendations in this report present a blueprint for other such efforts, transforming education for the benefit of Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous educators and learners of all ages. Standing on the shoulders of the 1972 policy paper, "Indian Control of Indian Education," this NCCIE report is another step along the journey toward Indigenous control of Indigenous education.

Returning full circle to Elder Verna Kirkness' quote at the beginning of this paper in which she recalls another Elder saying, "To have a vision, you close your eyes so you can see further." Closing our eyes, listening to the many voices in this report, we can

[128] Ibid.

[129] Retrieved December 16, 2021 from: https://oneca.com/IndianControlofIndianEducation.pdf; page 3.

envision a future where Indigenous education is equal to Western education. We envision a future where both approaches to learning combine powerfully to yield a new generation of citizens who have learned “what it is to be a human” and who are “code switchers” freed from racism and full of mutual respect for one another and for the wisdom of more than one way of knowing and being in this world. Is that not a worthy vision for *all* our children’s education?

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Appendix A
List of Participants in Zoom Discussions and In-Person Meetings

Alberta
Linda Many Guns, Regional Lead
Leah Bortolin, Research Associate
Fowzia Lopa, Research Associate
Fran Rogers, Research Associate

Atlantic Provinces and Labrador
Verlé Harrop, Regional Lead
Sylvia Moore, Regional Lead
Denise Cole, Community member
Neil Forbes, Community member
Amy Hudson, Community member
Sara Leah Hindy, Knowledge Mobilization Coordinator
Jennifer Martin, Community member
Patsy McKinney, Community member

Northeast Ontario
Kevin Fitzmaurice, Regional Lead
Ashley Nadjiwon, Research Associate
Crystal Osawamick, Research Associate
Echo Shay, Research Associate
John Vallely, Research Associate

Northwest Ontario
Leisa Desmoulins, Regional Lead
Tyler Armstrong, Research Associate
Kelsey Jaggard, Research Associate
Melissa Oskineegish, Research Associate

Manitoba
Laura Forsythe, Regional Lead
Richard Stecenko, Regional Lead

Nunavut
Kaviq Kaluraq, Regional Lead

Quebec
Annie Pilote, Regional Lead
Jean-Luc Ratel, Research Associate

Southern Ontario
Josh Dockstator, Regional Lead
Don McCaskill, Regional Lead
Phil Abbott, Research Associate
Jane Gray, Research Associate
Bobby Henry, Research Associate
Hanah McFarlane, Research Associate
Claire Mooney, Community member
Shirley Williams, Elder

Saskatchewan
Bettina Schneider, Principal Investigator and Regional Lead
Dustin Brass, Regional Lead
Bonnie Rockthunder, Regional Lead

Southern British Columbia/Vancouver Island
Jan Hare, Regional Lead
Sharon Hobenshield, Regional Lead
Jason Bruce, Research Associate and Regional Lead

***kêhtê-ayak* Elders Council, FNUNiv**
Florence Allen
Audrey Cochrane
Rose Bird
Willie Ermine
Kim Fraser-Saddleback, Coordinator
Preston Gardypie, oskâpêwis
Roland Kaye, oskâpêwis
Gilbert Kewistep
Mary Lee
Grace McLeod, Coordinator
Sylvia Obey
William Ratfoot
Judy Pelly
Margaret Reynolds

National Calls
Belinda Daniels, Knowledge Mobilization Coordinator
Leisa Desmoulins, Regional Lead
Joshua Dockstator, Regional Lead
Kevin Fitzmaurice, Regional Lead
Laura Forsythe, Regional Lead
Jan Hare, Regional Lead
Verlé Harrop, Regional Lead
Bob Kayseas, Vice President Academic, First Nations University of Canada
Sara Leah Hindy, Knowledge Mobilization Coordinator
Linda Many Guns, Regional Lead
Don McCaskill, Regional Lead
Herman Michell, Knowledge Mobilization Coordinator
Sylvia Moore, Regional Lead
David Newhouse, Principal Investigator
Annie Pilote, Regional Lead
Bettina Schneider, Principal Investigator and Regional Lead