



Yukon First Nations K–12 Language **Framework**

We Are Our Language



FNEC
"Holding up our dreams"



YUKON
FIRST NATION
EDUCATION
DIRECTORATE



First Nation
School Board

Appreciation

Thank you to all of the individuals who were willing to share their knowledge, wisdom and insight these last few months, and many years, through participation in the consultations, reports and studies that have gone into building this framework.

Recognition must also go out to our Yukon First Nations governments, communities and individuals who commit endless hours unconditionally to the work of First Nations language revitalization.

màhsi' choo	màhsi' cho	Sógá sénlá'	Másin cho
Niyę sáw nîdhín	Shàw níthän	Kwänäschis	Gùnètchīsh
Gunatchīsh	Tsin'jī choh	Thank you	Merci

Thank you also to [Yukon Native Language centre](#) for the use of their online translations throughout the document!



Preface

The information contained within this Framework, as directed by YFNED, has been gleaned from many years of information collected from past consultations, reports and projects, along with recent conversations and research on best practices for Yukon First Nations K-12 language learning.

This Framework is built around the recognition of two opposing facts coexisting within Yukon First Nations languages:

- Their importance
- Their critical state

Former AFN Chief, Shawn Atleo stated:

Indigenous languages represent the collective heritage and identity of this country and this land. Our Elders have called upon us never to forget our languages, to teach them and to learn from our languages. Indigenous languages must be recognized, fully supported and should be a source of celebration and pride throughout Canada (Young & Garron, 2011).

While we understand and internalize the importance of First Nations languages, we also know that all 8 Yukon First Nations languages are in a critical state with many only having a handful of fluent speakers. We also know that youth, who are the future of languages, are graduating from our schools without the fluency in their Ancestral languages that is needed for their revitalization.

Fluency and capacity go hand-in-hand for K-12 language learning. Everyone — First Nations, governments, authorities, communities, partners, families and individuals — needs to come together to provide the support so badly needed for the work already being done all across the Yukon.

This Framework, along with the Action Plan, is focused on past and present findings, experiences and advice from Yukon First Nations, partners and stakeholders. It sets a path for increased capacity within Yukon First Nations language communities, and among motivated language learners who have growing levels of fluency among the Yukon's K-12 student population.

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We Are Our Language

Diiginìk tr'iinlii	Gwich'in
Dihenjik tr'inlay	Hän
Kudzāge léts'et'e	Kaska
Dàyumnjī ech'l	Northern Tutchone
Dakwänjē nìich'e	Southern Tutchone
Dākwanjē' it'ē	Tagish
Hā yū -x'at' ángix	Tlingit
Nee'aaneeg ts'iilijj	Upper Tanana

Our Languages: Setting the Context

The history and core essence of Yukon First Nations is summarized succinctly in this passage from the Council of Yukon First Nations' (CYFN) website (2023):

From the earliest times the people have defined themselves by the environment and the animals. This basic principle is at the core, right at the very essence of all that is important to us. Our laws, our spiritual beliefs, our clan system, are based on our tremendous dependence on the environment.

We have legends and stories that tell us how we originated, how the world started, how everything came to be. These legends have persisted through the test of time and are still told today by our Elders and also by young people who are committed to learning this ancient oral tradition.

We have been taught by our Grandmothers that Crow was the one who started the world. He brought fish to the lakes; he brought the first light into the world by letting the sun, moon and the stars escape from a wealthy man, who owned them. Crow placed these into the sky so they would belong to everyone.

Indigenous languages express intellectual traditions that have been developing since time immemorial. They help speakers to pass on culture and connect to ancestors and generations yet to come. They allow for a link to the land, to cultural values and ceremonies, and to Indigenous ways of knowing, understanding, doing and honouring (Morcom, 2017).

The historic document, *Together Today for our Children Tomorrow* (1973), also describes the traditional Yukon First Nations life of yesterday, the important role of language and the devastating impact of language loss:

The Yukon has always been home to more than 6,000 people of Indian ancestry who, until even 75 years ago, always lived off the land in brush camps, by hunting, fishing and trapping in small tribes, who harvested the land carefully, and who kept the waters clear, the air pure and the land clean.

The Indian People had no books. Our way of life was handed down by word of mouth. This is how we learned our history.

The Whiteman has written history in books and it is taught in the schools. The Whiteman says history can teach him who he is and what mistakes he has made.

For many years before we heard about the Whiteman our people who lived in what is now called Yukon lived in a different way. We lived in small groups and moved from one place to another at different times of the year. Certain families had boundaries, which they could not cross to hunt, because that area was used by other Indians. Sometimes we gathered together in larger groups in the summer to fish and relax after a hard winter.

Education was handled by our parents and was done by children watching and copying what they saw. It was the method of learning by doing. A child was considered an adult, when he proved that he could handle adult responsibilities. (p.9)

Between 1900 and 1930 over half of our people died from Whiteman's diseases. During this time many people returned to the bush. We trapped or worked in the bush with Whitemen and became quite well off. There was no welfare, employment or housing programs needed.

During this time there was one program which continued to break down the First Nation family and the First Nation way of life. This was the residential school. Our children were taken away from their homes when they were six years old. Sometimes we never saw them again until they were sixteen.

We were taught in such a way that we were forced to give up our language, our religion, our way of life, and because of this, we no longer identified with our parents. Most of these people gave up the First Nation way, but could not accept the Whiteman's way, because we were not taught how to live and work the Whiteman's way. Only now are the Whitemen beginning to find out what was wrong with the Residential School System and how wrong it was.

We were caught between the two and didn't know which way to go. (p.11)

Yukon First Nations way of life—including the use of languages—has been disappearing at an alarming rate since the first outside contact through the fur trade, residential schools, the building of highways across traditional territories and the settlement impact upon the First Nation lands.

The extreme tragedy of this language loss for Yukon First Nations is more than just the loss of words; it is, at the same time, a loss of thousands of years of cultural understandings, rituals and practices (Arthurson, 2012).

A Review by the Assembly of First Nations (2011) states that, "Language tells us who we are. Our identity is tied to our language; it connects communities and defines our territories. Through language people are connected with their history, their ancestors and their land and as a language declines, so too does the sense of identity of a people" (p.24).

Arthurson (2012) further states, that "Language is the means through which we communicate our culture. If, as First Nations people, we want to retain our identities and transmit our values and our cultural practices to future generations then we must do whatever we can to keep our languages alive" (p. 3).

There are eight First Nations languages that have been traditionally spoken in the Yukon, each with multiple dialects. Each Yukon language offers a unique understanding of the world, and a method of conveying a particular way of life or telling distinctive oral histories (Burke, 2019, p.1).

A language shift from Indigenous languages to English has been occurring in the Yukon for many years. A fluency assessment (2004) by the Aboriginal Languages Services reports that all 8 Indigenous languages are in danger of vanishing, with Tagish nearing extinction and only a handful of speakers remaining in the Hän language. The Report also states that few children learn their ancestral tongue at home and English is the main language in schools, business and governments (Pressbooks, p.2).

There are fewer fluent speakers than there were in the past, with very few children speaking the language fluently (FNPP, 2007-08, p. 9). Jules (2019) states that, "We have one language that is dormant. It's in a process of reclamation, meaning that there aren't any birth speakers who fully understand the language. But the positive part is that there are members of that ethnic group advocating, engaging and trying to learn the language. So it's not extinct, it's being reclaimed. The rest of our languages are in the revitalization stage, where there has been a severe shift to using English" (p.4).

Yukon First Nations Languages

Yukon Indigenous Languages ¹	Language Family ¹	State of Language	Primary Geographic Locations ³
Gwich'in	Athapaskan*	Critical, needs immediate support. ² Less than 30 speakers in Old Crow and less than 295 in Canada (Duncan, 2019, p.3).	Old Crow; Fort McPherson, Aklavik, Tsiigehtchic, Inuvik, several Alaskan communities
Hän (Han)	Athapaskan	Critical, needs immediate support. ² Spoken by less than 9 elders (ELP, 2007).	Dawson City; Eagle, Alaska
Dene K'éh (Kaska)	Athapaskan	Critical, needs immediate support. ² Approximately 100 fluent speakers living in Kaska Territory (Liard First Nation, 2022, p.1)	Ross River, Watson Lake; Lower Post (BC)
Tàgish (Tagish)	Athapaskan	Critical, needs immediate support. ² 0 speaker worldwide (ELP website, 2023).	Tagish, Carcross
Nee'aaneegn' (Upper Tanana)	Athapaskan	Critical, needs immediate support. ² Less than 55 speakers worldwide (ELP, 2014).	Beaver Creek; Northway, Tetlin & Tok, Alaska
Lingít (Inland Tlingit)	Tlingit*	Critical, needs immediate support. ³ Less than 200 speakers worldwide (ELP, 2021)	Teslin, Carcross; Atlin, (BC) & several coastal Alaskan communities
Dän K'í (Northern Tutchone)	Athapaskan	Critical, needs immediate support. ² Only a handful of speakers (Balanced Education, 2014).	Mayo, Pelly Crossing, Carmacks
Dän K'è (Southern Tutchone)	Athapaskan	Critical, needs immediate support. ² Only about 50 speakers left (Smith, S., 2016).	Burwash, Haines Junction, Whitehorse-Lake Laberge

*The two families (Athapaskan and Tlingit) plus a third language family, Eyak—spoken in Alaska, make up the Na-Dene superfamily, which means “family”¹Information retrieved from:

- <https://www.pressbooks.bccampus.ca/echoyukonsfirstpeople/chapter/yukon-indigenous-languages/>
- Jules, (YNLC) at <http://www.newsroom.carleton.ca/story/recovering-yukon-languages/>
- <https://www.ynlc.ca/strategic-plan>

Yukon First Nations language programs are offered in schools across the Yukon in Gwich'in, Hän, Kaska, Northern Tutchone, Southern Tutchone, Tlingit and Upper Tanana where there is an available language teacher. Unfortunately, many times there is not a language teacher or speaker available and the classes must choose another language or subject in its place. Yukon First Nations have identified the restoration and revitalization of their languages as a critical priority. Several programming and curriculum options exist for the delivery in schools of First Nations languages and programming, but the capacity issues around language teacher availability must be dealt with in order for language revitalization to successfully move forward.

Realizing the alarming decline of Yukon First Nations languages, and recognizing the hopes and efforts already underway in the development of revitalization programs, it is time to call upon combined wisdom, knowledge and best practices to support these efforts and create a realistic and flexible YFNED K-12 Language Framework as a crucial piece of First Nations language revitalization.

In the words of Onowa McIvor (2006):

The languages used to be passed down naturally in homes, on the laps of our grandmothers, and on the land, and at the foot of the grandfathers on trap-lines. Indigenous languages are at such a critical state of endangerment that we must now create artificial ways to pass on the language. We need to come full circle, back to speaking our languages to the babies in the cradle and on the streets of our communities. (p. 25)

Yukon First Nations K-12 Language Framework

K-12 Language Vision

Our students are excelling in both worlds. They are rooted with fluency in their traditional language and knowledge of their culture and history, confidently living side-by-side with others, in a multilingual and multicultural society.

Our students have the opportunity to achieve language fluency; to acquire cultural competencies that are grounded in our stories, traditional ways and land-based learning opportunities that teach respect for self, others and the land.

K-12 Language Goals

1. Inspired Language Learners

First Nations students are graduating with increasing fluency levels and pride in their Ancestral languages and cultures.

2. Strong First Nations Language Personnel Capacity

Qualified, fluent First Nations language personnel are available to fill all language-related positions needed to support K-12 First Nations language learning throughout the Yukon.

Priorities

Legislation / Policy

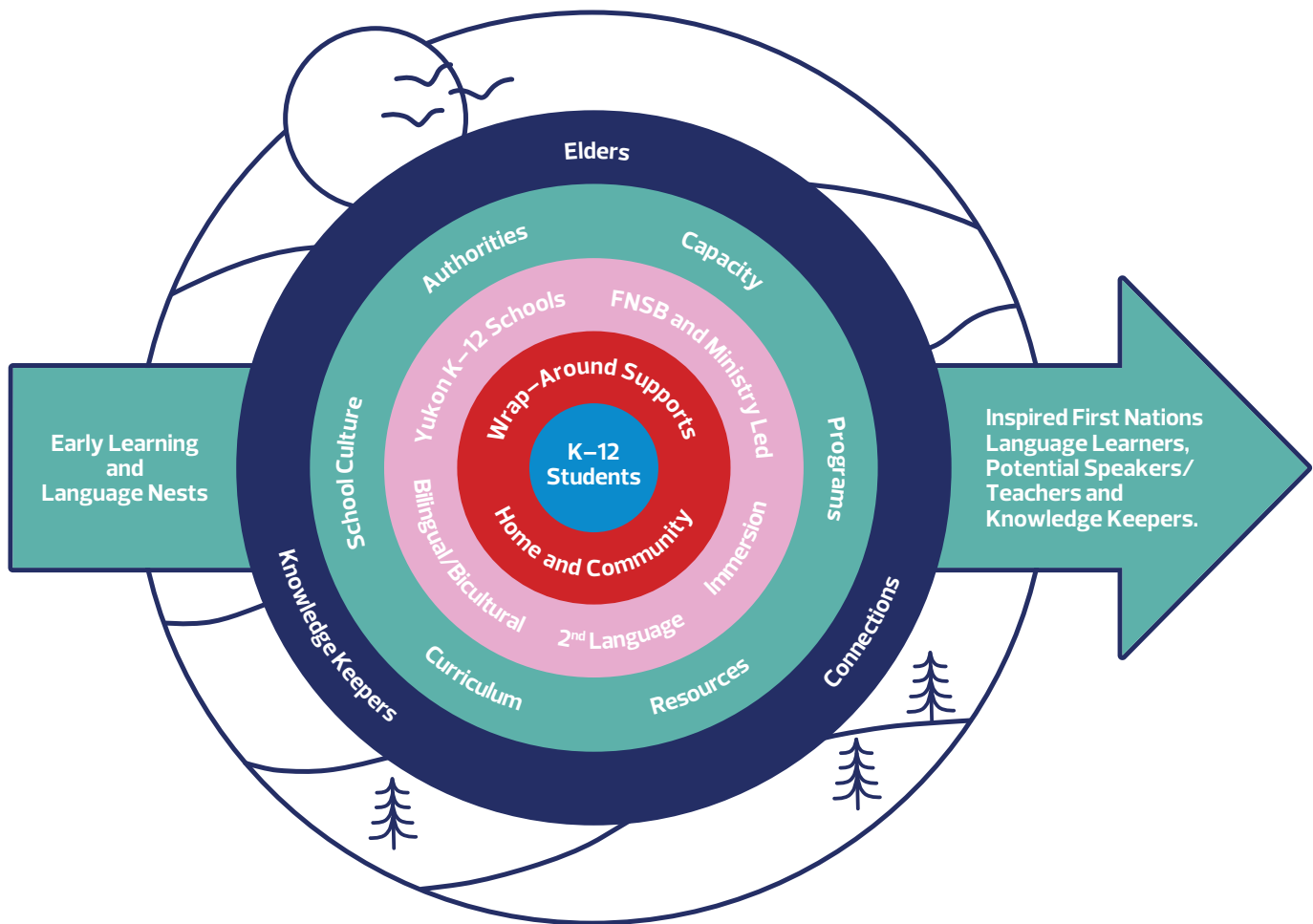
Programs / Curriculum / Resources

Communities / Connections / Supports

Elements of the Framework

K–12 Yukon First Nations Education Model

This model represents a student-centered, land-based, learning environment where youth are surrounded with support. A variety of programming is provided through FNSB or YG Public Schools, and programming is guided by the wisdom and knowledge of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and our Connections to the land, sky, water and others. The vision for this model is for all learning to happen on a natural continuum from Early Learning through adulthood, with language revitalization at the core.



Background Information

K-12 Language Programs

When Indigenous languages are lost through the effects of colonization and can no longer be passed on by parents and grandparents, research shows that schools can play a vital role in developing a language, and in teaching young students to speak, understand and use a language (Katenies Research and Management Services, 2011).

One of the most promising methods of language revitalization is through the inclusion of the Indigenous language as a language of instruction in schools. In the case of a threatened language, teaching young students in the language has been shown to be an effective method of producing more language speakers (Baker, 2006). Research has repeatedly demonstrated that the education children receive in school can play a vital role in developing a language and in teaching young students to speak, understand and use a language that is under threat from a more dominant mainstream language and culture (Baker, 2006, Cummins, 1983, Fishman, 1991).

In Canada, various types of school programs that offer instruction in a First Nations language have been implemented for some time, and at least one additional type of program currently offered in French in some districts. These programs include:

Language as a Subject (Core/Second Language)

Language may be included as a subject in any or all grades from K-12. Instruction is usually limited to 20-45 minutes for each lesson. It doesn't require every teacher to speak the language and avoids the need to develop a new curriculum and teaching materials. There is a lack of reporting on the impact of the language retention. The time spent on instruction of the language may be too short for students to learn language well (Blair, Okemow, & Zeidler, 2010).

In some instances, programs include cross-curricular connections to other subjects: for example, if the social studies unit explores traditional travel by canoe, vocabulary and actions of canoe building and travel may be the topic of the language unit. First Nations second language programs that teach content in the language (e.g., math problems, science observations, cultural activities, physical activities, arts, crafts, songs and drumming) with adequate time allocation can be considered on a continuum with partial immersion (FNESC, p 29).

One particular second language acquisition school in BC, the Senpaq'cin School, works with a language team consisting of a language teacher, language coordinator and an Elder. This team helps with language learning by working with classroom teachers to help incorporate language and culture into daily programming.

Bilingual Program (Partial Immersion)

Bilingual programs use both Indigenous language and English for instruction. Bilingual programs are developed to maintain the Indigenous language while teaching English, maintain the use of both Indigenous and English languages, or teach the Indigenous language while continuing use of English. The amount of fluency in the Indigenous language that is hoped for determines the type of bilingual program that is used (Blair, Okemow, & Zeidler, 2010).

Language Immersion

Language immersion uses only the language that is to be learned in the teaching of all subjects. All communication and classroom activities in the school are in the language. Immersion programs can be used when language loss is so great that more comprehensive exposure is required to maintain it (Blair, Okemow, & Zeidler, 2010).

Long-time Indigenous language revitalization advocates Grenoble and Whaley (2006) state that, “total immersion programs are the best option for revitalizing a language” (p 51). However, it is reflected in the literature that total immersion is not always possible (at least initially) and that communities may have a graduated or partial-immersion approach (Aguilera & Le Compte, 2007).

Although immersion education is the best practice at all levels, communities need to be realistic about what is possible at the present stage. For example, if it is determined that your community only has five fluent speakers who are able to help in revitalization efforts, then it is not possible to start a full immersion school right away. However, it is possible to have those five speakers act as masters to young apprentice teachers to help them become more fluent. It is those teachers who can eventually work toward increasing the hours of immersion in the school, with help from their master speakers. Though it may be necessary to start small, every little piece is a stepping-stone to fuller immersion over time (Franks, S., & Gessner, S., 2013).

Several First Nations language immersion programs have been inspired by Maori and Hawaiian language revitalization movements, which started with early childhood “language nests” and continued the immersion experience into the K-12 system. Language nests are places for young children — infancy to five years of age — that provide an immersion environment in their Indigenous language. The driving purpose of the nest is language transmission. Chief Atahm Immersion School, near Chase, BC, grew out of a language nest and has offered immersion education since the early 1990s. Their Secwepemctsin Immersion Program currently operates as a full immersion program at the K-3 levels, followed by bilingual education at the grade 4-9 levels that includes 2 hours per week of Secwepemctsin instruction. (McIvor & McCarty, 2016).

Immersion schools require fluent adults who are also trained and experienced classroom teachers. Programs like Chief Atahm School have successfully met this challenge through team teaching by fluent Elders and language apprentices who are trained as teachers (FNEESC, 2016).

Intensive French Model

This model does not currently exist for any First Nations language, but it might provide inspiration for a First Nations intensive language program that is a compromise between full immersion and a second language program. Intensive French is usually offered at the grade 5 or 6 level. In the first half of the year, 80 percent of the class time is taught in French, with 20 percent taught in English. During the first half of the year, students receive high-intensity, concentrated exposure to and instruction in French, which quickly builds confidence. During the second half of the year, students receive 20 percent instruction in French and 80 percent in English. In the French-intensive first half of the year, the curriculum is stripped of all but bare bones; in the second, English-intensive half of the year, the regular curriculum is compacted to meet learning outcomes for the year. The program continues with strong French instruction in the following years (usually one hour per day), called enhanced French. Data has indicated that the compacting of core curriculum has had no long-term impacts on overall student achievement levels. Providing that intensive French students receive enhanced French in grades 6-12, by the time they graduate from secondary school, their French skills are on par with French Immersion graduates (FNESC, 2016).

Various factors determine how quickly fluency levels are reached. Among learners and linguists alike, First Nations languages are commonly perceived to fall within the most difficult category requiring 1000 to 1200 hours for high intermediate proficiency, and 2400 to 2760 hours for high advanced proficiency. The time requirements associated with difficult languages have important implications for K-12 First Nations language education. This is further exacerbated by factors such as relatively fewer learning resources, limited language teacher training, and the limited ability to “soak oneself” in the language by being surrounded by the radio, TV, social networks, and speakers who are willing and able to remain in the language (FNESC, 2016).

This model does require fluent, confident speakers/teachers throughout the initial program year and the supporting years that follow.

Adult Immersion Programs

In *Pathways to Creating Onkwehonwehnéha Speakers at Six Nations of the Grand River Territory* (2017), a study is described that was undertaken to determine how to create a critical mass of speakers in the shortest period of time.

Instructional frameworks used at Six Nations are: on-line courses; night courses; language camps; self-directed learning; master apprentice program; pre-school, elementary and high school NSL programs; elementary, high school and adult immersion programs; and university/college programs and courses. The most effective instructional framework overall for speaking proficiency was determined by adding together the percentage ratings of each component of speaking proficiency for each instructional framework. Immersion is the most effective instructional framework for creating speakers of Onkwehonwehnéha at Six Nations. Adult immersion programs were rated as the most effective instructional frameworks for creating speakers of Onkwehonwehnéha (81.5%); followed by Master-Apprentice programs (63%) and elementary immersion programs (62.4%) (pp 36-37).

Second Language Proficiency Assessment

Second language proficiency assessment is an important part of learning a language. It gauges how well students are progressing in their language skills and helps measure the effectiveness of the language delivery model. Tulloch et al., state:

Effective assessment must measure the intended learning goals. Although not yet articulated in the K-12 Inuttitut curriculum, leaders and those involved in Nunatsiavut's K-12 language program say they want its goal to be creating speakers — people who can and do use the language in the community. To this end, assessment strategies that include real-life functions of the language, including outside of school, are appropriate. Some teachers are already doing so intuitively, and opportunities to share their practices, and to develop new ones in dialog with other Indigenous language teachers, would be welcomed. Well trained and supported teachers, clear, measurable learning objectives, effective activities for reaching these objectives, and appropriate tools for measuring progress are all part of developing an effective K-12 curriculum that will be part of Nunatsiavut's goal of revitalizing their Inuttitut language (2022).

Indigenous Land-Based Education

The term “land-based” is often used in conversations regarding Indigenous education, but what really is the understanding of the term? It may be that many regard the term as meaning “going outside” or “outdoor education”. While at times it may involve the outdoor aspect, it is so much more. Indigenous land-based education is multifaceted and can be interpreted in many ways by different people (UNESCO, 2021).

In UNESCO's *Land as Teacher* article (2021), Dr. Alex Wilson, of the Indigenous land-based graduate program at the University of Saskatchewan, views land-based education as “relational and focuses on understanding how knowledge connects to and comes from land, including water, sky and everything connected to them” (p.2). Outdoor education is at one far end of the spectrum, where at the other end, “it gives context to the knowledge that arise from the land as well as from a specific nation. It encompasses the preservation of culture, language and philosophy, and addresses the ramifications of colonization and “epistemicide” — the severing of Indigenous knowledge systems as a consequence of policies designed to limit or cut off access to food, sacred places, culture and language” (p 3).

Thomas Johnson, member of the Eskasoni Mi'kmaw Language Initiative group says, “authentic Indigenous land-based knowledge is embedded in language and in the stories that transfer knowledge passed down from our ancestors” (p 3). He explains that storytelling was an important technique used to retain information and that “losing the majority of our speakers was a direct result of what happens when a disconnect occurs between the Indigenous language and the land” (p 4).

Parent (2021) states, “We were put on a land that looked like us and given a language that sounds like the land, with the words to describe the land and all of its beings. This ties into language and place names. There is a strong connection between the re-establishment of Indigenous land-based names and the revitalization of Indigenous languages and culture” (p 5).

Land-based education, while reconnecting students to the land and supporting reconciliation by “breathing new life into languages and cultures” (Googoo, p 6), is growing in some school divisions in the NWT, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta with some schools using it as the centre of their core curriculum.

The Digital Learning Environment

Though land-based learning is critical for wellbeing, the platform in which culture and language is shared and learned is ever evolving. The digital landscape, for instance, cannot be underestimated as the emerging space and place for culture and language development for all ages and learning levels. Virtual learning and language preservation and promotion are found more and more through digital and social media, including DVDs, Facebook, YouTube, mobile apps and others (National Collaboration Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2016).

According to Bliss, H. and Thoma, S. (2022), there are several well-established language technologies that have been shown to successfully support specifically identified Indigenous language revitalization goals, including:

- The development of language specific keyboards and program fonts;
- Computer-aided language learning (CALL) modules and websites, including materials from YNLC, First Voices, digitized language videos, online dictionaries, video games and social media (pp 8, 9).

Locally, a new language app was recently developed and launched by the Liard First Nation. The Kaska Card app contains hundreds of Kaska words and phrases arranged in over 40 different topics, such as morning routines and medicinal plants (CBC, 2022).

The First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun has also put Quizlet online. This learning tool allows users to study and master the content in Northern Tutchone. All of the words from their dictionary have been included in the tool with sections including Learn, Flashcards, Test Functions, Match and Gravity games. This is another example of a local use of the digital landscape to promote language learning (Na-Cho Nyak Dun, 2022).

Elder and Knowledge Keeper Roles

Elders and Knowledge Keepers are essential in the provision of their wisdom, experience and guidance as Yukon First Nations move forward in culture and language revitalization. Whenever they share their knowledge and traditions, the learning is elevated. In *Together Today for our Children Tomorrow* it is stated that:

Elders are needed in their villages to help us regain our appreciation of the old way and of the First Nation values. It is from them that we will learn how to keep our culture alive. Our language must become a part of our lives. We must learn to speak, write and read it. The older people must be encouraged to teach our children the First Nation way in their “own communities” (pp19, 20).

Traditional knowledge, stories and values are passed down through their stories and expertise. Elders and Knowledge Keepers are critical partners in the integration of languages and culture throughout the curriculum. They provide traditional and modern ways of knowing, doing and being that go hand-in-hand with land-based learning.

It is important to make effective use of local expertise whenever local cultural knowledge is being addressed in the learning.

In a report to AFN, CYFN speaks to the past treatment of Elders within Yukon schools:

Key to First Nations education success will be our capacity to support and encourage Elder participation in student learning. Historically, the Elders in School model used in Yukon schools had been largely ineffective. The current model requires Elders to participate in a school environment that is intimidating and often recalls painful memories of residential school trauma. Asking Elders, who do not see themselves as teachers in a western context, to come into a classroom environment to teach First Nations culture, heritage and language has largely been unsuccessful. We therefore need to find new ways of supporting Elders in more natural environments and approaches. This will require significant consultation, program development and Elder supports as they gain comfort and confidence to support student learning (2022).

Moving forward, it is crucial for Elders and Knowledge Keepers to play an integral role in the strengthening of First Nation culture and language. That role must be honoured and respected.

Home and Community

No amount of changes in the Yukon education system will keep children in school unless First Nations parents become involved in planning changes so that they can understand them (*Together Today for our Children Tomorrow*, p.16).

Parents and community members play an important role in supporting the maintenance of languages and cultures through practice at home and in school programming. Where schools are not offering language programs, we need to become active in pushing for its inclusion. Where language programming exists, we must be diligent in making sure it is a quality education delivered by qualified teachers fluent in the local language. We must support the school by helping our children at home. In supporting our schools, we must remember that language and cultural retention is a community effort. Our First Nations languages are critical to our survival as First Nations people. If they disappear, there is nowhere else our children can go and learn them (Arthurson, 2012).

Communities must be supported to develop 'whole community' approaches. Languages must be established as living, working languages in families and communities. Hermes (2007) gives examples such as hosting informal dinners, community events and ceremonies that ensure that the language is used, thereby creating an arena for language practice to occur in the community.

Every person in a school, and ideally in a community, needs to do their part to work on language. For example, not only teaching language in a school, but also organizing language classes for parents and establishing language nests should be pursued and supported by the wider community and First Nation (firelight group, p. 38).

Psychological Supports

Twitchell (2018), in Bliss and Thoma (2022), emphasizes the need for a “safety zone” in which students can practice speaking without judgment from others who may have unreasonable expectations. The provision of facilitators with sufficient training to be supportive and compassionate, along with the development of group “ground rules” are required to help ensure a safe and supportive language learning environment. Dauenhauser & Dauenhauser (1998) state that, “individuals and communities are plagued and haunted with anxieties, insecurities, and hesitations about the value of their Indigenous language and culture. These insecurities must be addressed and resolved as an initial step before any meaningful action can be taken on a personal, family, or community level” (p. 63) McKenzie (2022) notes that “for Indigenous language educators, how we address historical trauma in our language may be one of the most critical factors affecting our potential to cultivate and maintain the wellness we seek for new generations of speakers of our languages. Indigenous language educators need to have training not only in language pedagogy but also in manifestations of historical trauma such as anxiety, shame, and fear. Just as they need training to support learners with grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, they also need training in how to support learners to overcome trauma” (p. 74).

Radio, Television and Social Media

Traditional communications, such as oral storytelling, dance and music are important in the transmission of language, culture and identity (AFN, 2007). Unfortunately, First Nations languages and culture are not adequately represented in modern communications media, such as television, social media and radio. Today, First Nations communities, especially youth, are exposed to primarily English and French media. The dilemma has resulted in valuable conversations on the importance of “resisting” or “modernizing” and “adapting” First Nations language and culture to modern telecommunications and mass media (AFN, 2007, p.17; FPCC, 2013, p.70). Communities have an opportunity to increase traditional communication and increase the use and transmission of language and culture through modern communications media.

First Nations Language Legislation and Policies

“The loss of our language caused by government policy such as the residential schools, forbidding the use of the language in day schools, and the “60’s Scoop” (the widespread adoption of First Nations children out to non-native families in the 60s, 70s and early 80s), prevented the transmission of our languages, our cultural beliefs and values to our children” (Arthurson, p.6).

Melanie Bennett (2021), Executive Director of the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, states that, “We are at a pivotal point for First Nations education in Yukon, creating the story of success. We need to continue to listen to the wisdom of our ancestors, while calling on the territorial and federal governments to uphold their responsibility to support the necessary changes in education for the First Nations students in Yukon — to address the systemic racism of low expectation” (YFNED, 2021, p.3).

Declarations, legislation and policies developed at the international, national, territorial and local levels have been adopted in recognition of the importance and support of Indigenous language reclamation. Legislation is an important element in language resurgence and assists in the availability of predictable, sustainable funding for long-term language planning (AFN, 2020, p.7).

International

THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2008) was adopted without qualification by Canada in 2016. It sets out the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples (BC AFN, 2019, p. 5). Language provisions include:
 - Article 13, section 1, which states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons” (United Nations, 2008, p.12).
 - Article 14, section 1, which states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning (United Nations, 2008, p.13).

Federal

THE CONSTITUTION ACT

- Section 35, The Constitution Act, (Canada, 1982) states that, “The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.” First Nations languages are inherent, treaty and constitutional rights and language has been affirmed as a fundamental international human right by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which puts binding treaty obligations on Canada as a signatory (AFN, 2020, p.7). This section includes language rights, meaning that Aboriginal peoples have the right to express themselves, conduct their lives, and educate their children in their own languages (BCAFN, 2019, p.11).

BILL C-91

- In 2019, Bill C-91, An Act respecting Indigenous languages (ILA), became Canadian law. The ILA establishes the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous languages at arms-length from government. It also provides avenues for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples to exercise inherent jurisdiction related to language rights through the signing of agreements. There is no guarantee of funding, only a direction to consult with Indigenous organizations “in order to meet the objective to providing adequate, sustainable and long-term funding” (BCAFN, Bill C-91, 2019, p.6).

THE ACT

1. Legislates the government’s behaviour towards Indigenous languages;
2. Acknowledges the detrimental effects of government policies and practices on intergenerational language transmission;
3. Affirms Indigenous language rights as Section 35 rights, Constitution Act, 1982;
4. Advances language-related articles of the UN Declaration, including media, intellectual property, among others;
5. Responds to, and implements, the TRC Calls to Action (13, 14 and 15);
6. Empowers self-determined language rights;
7. Acknowledges that Indigenous Peoples are best placed to lead language revitalization efforts (First Nations Rights and Control);
8. Supports and funds Indigenous-led language revitalization efforts;
9. Supports First Nations community development and/or maintenance of language law and policies, including declaring an ancestral language as an official language/language of operation in the community;
10. Supports the principle of access to languages, regardless of age or place of residence;
11. Promotes the use of Indigenous languages;
12. Provides legal assurance for adequate, sustainable and long-term funding;
13. Expresses a commitment from the Minister of Canadian Heritage to consult with Indigenous Peoples about providing adequate, predictable, and long-term funding for Indigenous languages reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening;
14. Supports the establishment of new Indigenous-led language entities, and the bolstering of entities where they already exist, to address gaps where they are desired, needed, and requested;
15. Creates an Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages;
16. Creates parameters for the work of the Commissioner, such as conducting research and providing support to applicants for research and studies related to funding, performance measures, and community assessments; reporting on the implementation of the Act, including the adequacy of funding and receiving complaints;
17. Supports a multifaceted approach to language acquisition (including immersion programs, day cares, language nests, language camps, mentor-apprentice, on-the-land learning, adult courses, silent speakers programs, language house, among others);
18. Allows for a flexible and staggered approach to language planning i.e. language programs/strategies can respond to multiple different language states;
19. Supports First Nations governments, governing bodies and language entities in making agreements with different levels of governments (provincial/territorial and federal);
20. The Act supports partnerships (including cross-jurisdictional partnerships) which are Indigenous-led (AFN, pp 28-29);

THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF CANADA: CALLS TO ACTION

- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action (TRC) found that residential schools constituted what's called cultural genocide: "The destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group." The TRC also gifted us with 94 calls to action, beacons that can lead the way forward as we work (Morcom, 2020).
- In order to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission makes the following Calls to Action in regards to education, culture and language – among others.

We call upon:

(Parts of Education, Language and Culture Sections 6-17)

- The federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:
 - Developing culturally appropriate curricula.
 - Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.
- The federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights.
- The federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act that incorporates the following principles:
 - Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them.
 - Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties.
 - The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation.
 - The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities.
 - Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages.
- The federal government to appoint, in consultation with Aboriginal groups, an Aboriginal Languages Commissioner. The Commissioner should help promote Aboriginal languages and report on the adequacy of federal funding of Aboriginal-languages initiatives.
- Post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages (TRC, 2015, pp.1-2).

THE NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

- The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) was established by the Government of Canada in 2016. The 2019 report includes the Calls to Justice section 2.3, which directs governments to support a variety of actions meant to provide all Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people with safe, no-barrier, permanent, and meaningful access to their cultures and languages in order to restore, reclaim, and revitalize their cultures and identities (BCAFN, National Inquiry into Missing Indigenous Women & Girls, 2019, p.65).
- In addition, the Calls to Justice call on government to recognize Indigenous languages as official languages, with the same status, recognition, and protection provided to French and English. This includes the directives that:
 - Federal, provincial and territorial governments must legislate Indigenous languages in the respective territory as official language, and
 - All governments must make funds available to Indigenous Peoples to support the work required to revitalize and restore Indigenous cultures and languages (BCAFN, National Inquiry into Missing Indigenous Women & Girls, 2019, p.65).

Other Calls to Justice appeal to governments to:

- Uphold Indigenous children's rights to be educated in their Indigenous languages by calling on governments to ensure access to immersion programs for children from preschool into post-secondary education,
- Provide the necessary resources and permanent funds required to preserve knowledge by digitizing interviews with Knowledge Keepers and language speakers, and
- Provide services in Indigenous languages (BCAFN, National Inquiry into Missing Indigenous Women & Girls, 2019, p.65).

THE TRIPARTITE AGREEMENT

- The Tripartite Agreement, a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2012 by the Government of Canada, Government of Yukon and Yukon First Nations, as well as the Council of Yukon First Nations, is a commitment by the parties to establish a partnership to improve First Nations student achievement in the Yukon and, specifically, for the Yukon and First Nations governments to develop an action plan that includes performance indicators that address common educational priorities. The Parties agreed to develop a long-term strategic action plan for a life-long learning process for First Nations students in the territory, with a priority on the K-12 systems (Canada, 2013).

JOINT EDUCATION ACTION PLAN

- Joint Education Action Plan (JEAP) 2014-2024 was initiated from the 2012 Tripartite MOU between 9 Yukon First Nations (as of March, 2013), and the governments of Yukon and Canada. Priorities include, but are not limited to:
 - K-12 Culture and Language
 - Recognition of the diversity of Yukon First Nations peoples, communities, languages, cultures, traditions and spiritual practices and the need for culturally appropriate education are embedded within the MOU. The MOU also states that all parties agree that the Yukon education curriculum must include the cultural and linguist heritage of YFN people.

The JEAP is managed through an Implementation Plan with sections 1.1 through 1.5 dedicated to Culture and Language.

Yukon Territorial Government

YUKON LANGUAGE ACT

- Yukon Language Act states that French and English are recognized as official languages only, but services may be provided in Aboriginal languages as detailed in four of thirteen sections:
 - 1 (3) The Yukon recognizes the significance of Aboriginal languages in the Yukon and wishes to take appropriate measures to preserve, develop, and enhance those languages in the Yukon.
 - 2 Nothing in this Act limits the authority of the Legislative Assembly to advance the equality of status of English, French, or a Yukon Aboriginal language.
 - 3 (1) Everyone has the right to use English, French, or a Yukon Aboriginal language in any debates and other proceedings of the Legislative Assembly.
 - 11 The Commissioner in Executive Council may make regulations to the provision of services of the Government of the Yukon in one or more of the Aboriginal languages of the Yukon (languages Act, 2016).

Currently, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut are the only Canadian jurisdictions to enact legislation recognizing Indigenous languages as official languages. Nunavut recognizes Inuit language, English and French (Office of the Language Commissioner of Nunavut, 2013). The Northwest Territories recognizes 11 official languages: Chipewyan, Cree, English, French, Gwich'in, Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun, North Slavey, South Slavey and Tłı̄chho. There is a Language Commissioner and an Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board (Official Languages Act, 2020).

Yukon has a Yukon French Language Services Directorate, established in 2006, to support the territorial government's departments and agencies in meeting their responsibilities under the Yukon's Languages Act.

THE EDUCATION ACT

- The Education Act of the Government of Yukon describes the Department of Education as being responsible for delivering accessible and quality education to Yukon learners.

Section 49 states that if there is a conflict between the Act and either, a Yukon Land Claim Agreement that is in force; or a Self-Government Agreement between a Yukon First Nations and the Government of Canada or the Yukon that is in force, then the Yukon Land Claim Agreement or Self-Government Agreement shall prevail to the extent of the conflict.

Three sections (50, 51 and 53) deal specifically with Yukon First Nations in the areas of Language of Instruction, Yukon Heritage and Environment and Aboriginal languages.

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

50(1) The Minister may authorize an educational program or part of an educational program to be provided in an Aboriginal language after receiving a request to do so from a School Board, Council, school committee, Local First Nation Authority or, if there is no Local First Nation Education Authority, from a Yukon First Nation.

- (2) In deciding whether to authorize instruction in an Aboriginal language, the Minister shall consider
- (a) The number of students to be enrolled in the instruction;
 - (b) The availability of resources and personnel for the instruction
 - (c) The educational feasibility of providing the instruction; and
 - (d) The effect of the instruction on students who receive their instruction in English.

YUKON HERITAGE AND ENVIRONMENT

51 The Minister shall include in courses of study prescribed for use in schools, studies respecting the cultural, linguistic and historical heritage of the Yukon and its Aboriginal people, and the Yukon environment.

ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

52 (1) The Minister shall provide for the development of instructional materials for the teaching of Aboriginal languages and the training of Aboriginal language teachers.

(2) The Minister shall employ Aboriginal language teachers to provide Aboriginal language instruction in schools in Yukon.

(3) An Aboriginal language teacher shall be under the supervision of the principal of the school where the Aboriginal language teacher is providing instruction.

(4) An Aboriginal language teacher when providing Aboriginal language instruction shall be deemed to be a teacher for the purposes of section 166 of this Act.

(5) The Minister shall establish policies and guidelines on the amount of instruction and the timetabling for the instruction of Aboriginal languages in consultation with appropriate Local First Nation Education Authorities, School Boards and Councils.

(6) The Minister shall meet on an annual basis with the Central First Nation Education Authority to review the status of Aboriginal language instruction in Yukon schools and shall make appropriate modifications if necessary.

Yukon First Nations

YUKON FIRST NATIONS UMBRELLA AND SELF-GOVERNING FINAL AGREEMENTS

- Yukon First Nations Umbrella Final Agreement (UFA) is a framework for negotiating the individual Final Agreements finalized in 1990. It was signed on May 29, 1993 by the Government of Canada, the Government of Yukon and the Council of Yukon First Nations. The UFA is not a legal document, but rather a “political” agreement made between the three parties. It serves as the overall agreement of the Yukon Land claims package and provides a framework for each of the 14 Yukon First Nations Final Agreements. Chapter 24 contains information on the devolution of programs and services. Specifically:
 - 24.3.2 For greater certainty, pursuant to 24.2.1, Government and the Yukon First Nations may negotiate the devolution of programs and services dealing with the following:
 - 24.3.2.1 Yukon First Nations authority for the design, delivery and management of First Nation language and cultural curriculum; and in
 - 24.3.2.3 the division and sharing of Yukon First Nations and Government responsibility for the design, delivery and administration of programs relating to,

Education

- a. First Nation student counseling
- b. Cross cultural teacher/administrator orientation
- c. Composition of teaching staff
- d. Early childhood, special, and adult education curriculum
- e. Kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum
- f. The evolution of teachers, administrators and other employees

As stated within this chapter, Yukon First Nations can negotiate the transfer of programs and services dealing with the authority for the design, delivery and management of Yukon First Nations languages and cultural education, K-12 education along with other areas.

Each Nation’s Final Agreement contains the UFA plus their own specific provisions.

Self-government to Yukon First Nations means Yukon First Nations people controlling and directing their own affairs in accordance with their Aboriginal rights as recognized in their Yukon First Nations Final and Self-Government Agreements. The Agreements provide for funding which support the delivery of programs and services at the First Nation level. To date, 11 Yukon First Nations have attained self-government agreements (CYFN, 2022).

YUKON GOVERNMENT EDUCATION AGREEMENTS WITH YUKON FIRST NATIONS

- Yukon Government Education Agreements with Yukon First Nations are currently in effect with a number of Yukon First Nations who have entered into government-to-government education agreements with the Government of Yukon. These agreements are designed to reflect the unique educational needs and priorities of each community so that educational outcomes can be improved.

Current Authorities and Roles in Yukon First Nations Languages

Yukon Native Language Centre

The Yukon Native Language Centre (YNLC) provides key services in preserving and restoring Yukon First Nations languages. As of 2018, all responsibility and administration for the Centre was transferred from the Government of Yukon to the Council of Yukon First Nations. YNLC's role in the survival and revitalization of Yukon First Nations languages is vital. Their vision, values, mandate and principles, as set out in their 2018–21 Strategic Plan, provide a glimpse at how important they are to Yukon First Nations languages. The Plan states, "It is paramount to immediately support and create a new generation of fluent speakers with the highest levels of language proficiency needed to pass on the language to future generations. Essentially, to create the speakers needed to teach babies in the home of their First Nation language once again, and to create speakers to work in future immersion programs such as nests, camps, and schools and in community programs" (YNLC, 2021).

The Strategic Actions, as presented in the 2018–21 Strategic Plan, include key strategies directly related to the capacity building needs for K–12 schools and Yukon First Nations communities.

The YNLC's Strategic Plan has been implemented through many actions and programs over the three years of its mandate. These include, but are not limited to:

1. YNLC's Yukon First Nations Language Proficiency Programs are currently being offered in partnership with CYFN and Simon Fraser University (SFU). In a recent graduation ceremony, 8 graduates alongside 13 fluent speakers of Gwich'in, Hän, Kaska, Northern Tutchone, Southern Tutchone, Tagish, Lingít, and Upper Tanana were honoured for their participation and accomplishments. The graduates have completed the first step in a ladder program where students can continue to complete an intermediate/advanced Diploma that also ladder into SFU's new BA degree with a minor in Indigenous languages (Lyons, 2021).
2. A new program, called The Youth Today: Language Leaders Tomorrow, is now being offered through YNLC, whereby 20 youth are being paid to take classes full-time in their Indigenous language. Each program participant has a personalized plan that includes a combination of online classes and land-based learning (CBC, 2021). This program is experiencing success in language learning, but it remains to be seen how many of the graduates will choose to enter the field of teaching or will want to share their land-based learning within a classroom setting.
3. Another initiative taken on by YNLC entails the production of 280 videos recorded across Yukon's 14 First Nations. The program is concentrated on gathering language and cultural information that has not been documented before. Each First Nation will have a representative videographer who will receive training at the centre and will be supplied with an equipment kit, including a tripod, audio recorder, video recorder and a laptop. According to Tina Jules, former Director at YNLC, "If you think about revitalization in the broader context, it's about making our languages, the first language again in every aspect of our life, whether it's in home, at work, in government" (Silva, 2019).
4. The development of 80 children's books is underway with, 20 titles by Robert Munsch being created in the languages of Tlingit, Southern Tutchone, Kaska and Northern Tutchone. Shadelle Chambers, Executive Director of CYFN, explains, "It is important to have language resources for children because we know that it is where the intergenerational transmission of language skills happen — between parent and child, naturally at home, in a young age group" (CHON FM, 2022).

Individual Yukon First Nations

Individual Yukon First Nations are already leading the way in language revitalization in communities. Dän K'e Kwänjē Ghäkendän (We are learning our language) is a Dákwänhē adult language immersion program offered through the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations (CAFN). Khâsha has been teaching in this one-of-a-kind program for the last three years to a cohort of eight adult students in Haines Junction (Dakwäkäda). With language proficiency as the program's goal, the days are focused on speaking with weekly visits from Elders who reinforce the language with cultural practices. CAFN invested \$1 million into the project, and pays students to take the program. Former Chief Steve Smith says that the program was modeled around the Mohawk Kahnawà:ke Reserve's immersive language program, the Kanien'kéha Ratiwennahní:rats Adult Immersion Program. "Dun gae," says Former Chief Smith. "That translates to 'our way.' One of the things that we made the commitment to in 2017 was we were no longer going to sit idly by and let another government run and dictate to us what our language program was going to look like"(Connors, 2020).

Liard First Nation developed a 10 year Kaska Language Strategy Plan in 2019, which includes goals and priorities for schools. Within the plan are strategies for building local capacity in language work, such as the provision of opportunities for paid, intensive language training, the teaching of university-accredited language courses with the development of a progressive curriculum and the development of a Kaska language mobile app.

Communities will gravitate to different language programs depending upon the local situation and the state of their language. Communities with only a handful of speakers and few programs may heavily rely upon individual master-apprentice programs and on the training of language teachers. Communities with many silent speakers may prioritize support for these people as they build a strong foundation. In the early stages of building an intensive program, First Nations may put a lot of resources into building community support, developing language strategies and initiating pilot programs. Choices will be made specific to community circumstances (Research, 2021).

Yukon University's Yukon Native Teacher Education Program

Yukon University's Yukon Native Teacher Education Program (YNTEP) began in 1989 and is committed to building educational practices and institutions that support reconciliation and decolonization. There are two YNTEP programs. The original program is a four-year, 120-credit program leading to a Bachelor of Education degree credentialed by the University of Regina. The full-time program is comprised of fall and winter coursework, a 4-week spring practicum in a rural community, a 1-week summer cultural camp, and a 16-week internship. There is also a two-year, 60-credit, after-degree program that leads to a Bachelor of Education degree credentialed by the University of Regina (Yukonu.ca, 2021).

Within the Yukon and First Nations there is a severe capacity problem within the K-12 education system in the area of First Nations speaker and language teacher availability. A challenge exists for YNTEP, along with YNLC, individual First Nations and language authorities to investigate options together in the provision of additional pathways for language learners to obtain language teacher degrees and certification.

According to an environmental scan recently prepared by the firelight group, (2021):

The Nêhiyâwiwin Cree Language and Culture Program at wâhkôhtowin School in Saskatoon have partnerships with the University of Saskatchewan's Indigenous Education Program. The university integrates teacher training theory courses to happen at wâhkôhtowin School, and teachers also do practicums at the school. In terms of Cree-language support, the Nêhiyâwiwin Cree Language and Culture Program provides peer-to-peer support between fluent and non-fluent teachers (June 22, 2021). This program has proven hugely beneficial to hiring Cree teachers (2021, p 14).

Xetólacw Community School (BC) is currently working with FNEC to upgrade their Indigenous staff members who are working as Education Assistants (EAs). To help overcome the stigma that they are not officially "teachers", FNEC is developing a program, which will grant EAs a certificate, which will enable them to teach in First Nations schools in the jurisdiction of FNEC (firelight, p 14).

Initiatives like these and others from across the country may help in alleviating, at least in part, the serious lack of capacity of the Yukon's First Nations language teacher availability.

Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN)

Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN) has been in existence since 1973 and serves the needs of First Nations within the Yukon and MacKenzie delta. The Council plays an important role in intergovernmental relations on behalf of Yukon First Nations with a mandate to serve as a political advocacy organization for First Nations holding Traditional Territories, in the Yukon to protect their rights, titles and interests (CYFN, 2022).

Chiefs Committee on Education (CCOE)

Chiefs Committee on Education (CCOE) was reestablished in 2018 to negotiate a framework agreement for First Nations education. Ten Yukon First Nations signed onto the Framework Agreement. The CCOE established the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate in 2020 and continues to steer and govern the work of YFNED (YFNED, 2022). They also negotiated the *Agreement Respecting Education and the Establishment of a First Nation School Board* in the Yukon, resulting in the establishment of the First Nation School Board in 2022.

YUKON FIRST NATION EDUCATION DIRECTORATE (YFNED)

- Yukon First Nation Education Directorate (YFNED) reports directly to the CCOE and is mandated by the CCOE to:
 1. Provide First Nations with the professional and technical support they require to ensure an education system that supports Yukon First Nations learners and helps them realize their full potential.
 2. Support and direct the negotiation of a bilateral Yukon Education Agreement whereby YFN's assume full control and administration of First Nations school(s) (YFNED, 2022).

Programs within YFNED currently employ four specialized teams to provide wraparound services to Yukon's First Nations children and youth:

- First Nation Education Advocates
- Mobile Therapeutic Unit
- Nutrition Program
- Early Years

FIRST NATION SCHOOL BOARD

- First Nation School Board was established by the CCOE in 2022, and through a series of territory-wide referenda, assumed shared authority with the Government of Yukon in the delivery of public-school education at 8 schools. In the 2023-24 school year, FNSB will operate 11 Yukon public schools and is setting up Community Committees to ensure localized input and authority. Board-run schools continue to follow BC curriculum, but tailor the programming, lesson delivery and assessment methodology to reflect Yukon First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing, including increased resources and programming for Yukon First Nations language learning (FNSB, 2022).

FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION COMMISSION (FNEC)

- First Nations Education Commission (FNEC) is an education committee with members appointed through their First Nation leadership. Usually the members oversee their First Nation's education portfolio. Education priority setting, communication and engagement processes flow between Yukon First Nations and the Yukon Department of Education, via this commission. FNEC is provided oversight, direction and guidance by the CCOE.

Yukon Education

Yukon Education holds responsibility over all schools and is responsible for Yukon Education, as outlined in the *Education Act*.

YUKON EDUCATION – FIRST NATIONS INITIATIVES

- Yukon Education – First Nations Initiatives was created within the Public Schools in 2006 and is dedicated to four goals:
 1. Building productive relationships with First Nations communities by developing and maintaining partnerships with all stakeholders involved in First Nations education;
 2. Increasing the amount of First Nations perspectives in Yukon schools by developing First Nations curriculum and resource materials;
 3. Improving the academic results of First Nations students in the K-12 system by incorporating First Nations education programs in Yukon schools;
 4. Providing support to and enhancing First Nations' efforts to revitalize their languages by offering First Nations language programs in Yukon schools. This must be accomplished through meaningful and productive working relationships with Yukon First Nations governments and the Council of Yukon First Nations (First Nations Initiatives, 2022).

YUKON ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS (YAEP)

- Yukon Association of Education Professionals (YAEP) is a professional association representing educators across the Yukon. Every three years the YAEP enters into a bargaining process with the Government of Yukon (YG). The current Collective Agreement between the two parties outlines the purpose of the Agreement and definitions used within the document.
 - 1.01.1 The purpose of this Agreement is to maintain harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships between the employer and the Yukon Association of Education Professionals, and to set forth certain terms and conditions of employment relating to salaries and working conditions affecting employees covered by the Agreement.
 - 1.01.1 The parties to this Agreement share a desire to improve the quality of education in Yukon, to maintain professional standards and produce the highest quality of instructional service, and to promote the well-being and increased excellence of its employees to the end that students and the people of Yukon will be well and effectively served. Accordingly, they are determined to establish within the framework provided by the law, an effective working relationship.

For the purpose of this Agreement:

“Yukon First Nations Language Teacher” means a member of the bargaining unit other than a Teacher, Teacher on Call, Remedial Tutor or Educational Assistant: “Yukon First Nations Language Teacher” in the Collective Agreement refers and corresponds to “Aboriginal Language Teacher” in the Education Act (YAEP, p. 1).

Engagement with Community and Critical Partners

More than thirty years ago, Irish language activist Fennel reminded us:

A shrinking language minority cannot be saved by the actions of well-wishers who do not belong to the minority in question. In particular, its shrinking cannot be halted by the action, however benevolent and intelligent, of a modern centralized state. It can be saved only by itself; and then only if its members acquire the will to stop it shrinking, acquire the institutions and financial means to take appropriate measures, and take them (1980).

The importance of local First Nations communities' involvement in the assessment of their local situation and the planning and administering of programming for those situations cannot be overstated. Support and partnerships, however, are key in the success of local programs.

It is important to understand and appreciate the language of “partnerships” and “relationships” and why one does not always relate to the other. During an interview by “the firelight group” with staff at the Land and Language Based Learning Program at Ladysmith Secondary School in BC, it was stated,

... remember, those (formal partnerships) are all colonial, and that's not what we do. And we've tried it in the past, but they always fail. Because the people come and go in their jobs, and then they don't know. They can't be in relationships because the systems don't let them (p. 16).

The firelight group further explains:

Thus, being in a relationship – rather than a formal partnership – is the Indigenous way, where the focus is on establishing and nurturing constructive long-term relationships based on mutual respect, trust, collaboration, and accountability. From an Indigenous approach, ‘partnerships’ are singular and fragmented, whereas genuine and reciprocal relationships are an integral part of the education system (p. 16).

While walking and working in two worlds, it is important to remember that relationships and partnerships are necessary and both must be nurtured and respected by all parties.

It is important also to learn from those who have similar experiences. One example in local language development is the French community. Although language capacity is not the same, much can be learned from what they have discovered in their journey of working through agreements, programs, and curriculum and resource development. They have negotiated and partnered with many of the same individuals, organizations and governments that are in association with, and critical to, the language work taking place now with Yukon First Nations.

What's Been Heard Before?

Together Today for our Children Tomorrow

In 1973, Elijah Smith and a delegation of Yukon Chiefs journeyed to Ottawa and met with Canada's Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. The historic document presented a statement of grievances and an approach to settlement that led to negotiations for the first modern-day treaty in Canada.

The Kwiya Report

In 1987, the Government of Yukon and the Council for Yukon Indians were appointed to undertake the responsibilities of the Joint Commission on First Nation Education and Training. The Commission was directed to:

“Investigate and report on the reasons why many of Yukon’s First Nations people have not taken, or have been unable to take full advantage of educational opportunities presently available to the Yukon society in general, and on where the education system has been unable to meet their specific needs.”

And to:

“Provide the Government and the Council with recommendations for changes to procedures, practices and policies which would assist in making the education system more responsive to the needs of the Indian People of the Yukon...”

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the governments of Canada and Yukon officially recognize equality of opportunity in education for First Nation People;
- That the governments of Canada and Yukon formally recognize First Nation culture as part of Yukon society;
- That the governments of Canada and Yukon recognize the immediate need for a First Nation Education Commission to represent the interests of First Nation People;
- That the government of Yukon, in partnership with First Nation People, initiate specific legislative policy and structural reforms of Yukon’s education system (JCIET, 1987).

The Education Reform Project

The purpose of the 2007 Education Reform Project was to engage First Nations governments, citizens and other partners in education to effect positive, sustainable change in the education system in the Yukon for the benefit of all Yukoners. The ERP's final recommendations pertaining to Yukon First Nations languages included:

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A First Nations Aboriginal Language Institute should be established. This institute would be accountable to Yukon First Nations and would work in conjunction with the Governments of Yukon and Canada.
- The Department of Education and Aboriginal Language Services should fund linguistic, cultural and immersion programs in select Yukon communities. This would guide future program planning and implementation.
- The Department of Education and CYFN should examine aboriginal language programs in Yukon schools, with the intent of increasing the number of instructional minutes allotted to them.
- The Department of Education, YNTEP and YNLC should provide funding for an apprenticeship component within the Aboriginal language program. This would immerse Yukon First Nations language trainees in language and culture with fluent elders.
- The Government of Yukon should increase funding to the Department of Education for a Yukon First Nations language curriculum framework and for the development of curriculum and classroom support materials.
- Each First Nation should set aside funds within their annual budget for a Yukon First Nations language promotion campaign. The campaign could sponsor art, sport, recreational and cultural activities which encourage and promote the use of Yukon First Nations languages.
- Yukon First Nations should encourage the use of Yukon First Nations languages in meetings and community gatherings and, where possible, should provide translation services at these activities.

“The establishment of a First Nations secondary school has become a possibility, either within the sole jurisdiction of one or more First Nations or in collaboration with the Government of Yukon. If consideration is given to establishing a First Nations school, a comprehensive work plan will need to be developed and supported by students, parents, First Nations and relevant government partners. A successful First Nations school is most likely to become a reality if Yukon First Nations are active participants” (ERP Final Report, 2007).

The Independent Auditor's Report: Kindergarten Through Grade 12 Education in Yukon – Department of Education

The Report of the Auditor General of Canada (2019) involves findings from the Government of Yukon's delivery of K-12 education. The audit was focused on whether the Department of Education delivered education programs that were inclusive and reflected Yukon First Nations culture and languages, and whether it assessed and addressed gaps in student outcomes. Overall, it was found that the Yukon Department of Education did not know whether its programs met the needs of students, particularly those with special needs and those from Yukon First Nations. In addition, the Department has responsibilities and commitments to provide education programs that reflect Yukon First Nations culture and languages. It was found that the Department did not do enough to create a partnership with Yukon First Nations that would allow it to fully develop and deliver such programs. It was also found that the Department did not provide enough direction, oversight, and support to help schools deliver culturally inclusive programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Department of Education should complete and implement its policy to collaborate with Yukon First Nations to meet the Education Act's requirements. It should also develop a strategic plan with specific, measurable actions and timelines to support its work with Yukon First Nations.
- The Department of Education should meet regularly with Yukon First Nations to assess the status of the Joint Education Action Plan's initiatives and determine how and when to complete those that remain.
- In partnership with Yukon First Nations, school boards, and school councils, the Department of Education should develop policies and guidelines to support First Nations language learning. While developing the policies and guidelines, the Department should
 - Work with these partners to determine the language goals for individual schools;
 - Consider a range of approaches – for example, introductory classes to full immersion programs – that depend on the specific language, student population density, and community interest; and
 - Identify options to support Yukon First Nations languages both during regular school hours and outside the regular classroom.

(The Education Act requires the Department of Education to establish policies and guidelines on the amount of instruction and the scheduling of Yukon First Nations language instruction in schools, in consultation with Yukon First Nations, school boards, and school councils.)

- The Department of Education should determine the human resources and training required to develop sufficient classroom support and materials to help teachers implement the new curriculum as it pertains to Yukon First Nations culture and languages (pp 29, 30).

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE CCOE IN RESPONSE TO THE 2019 AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING

- That YNLC and YFNED have adequate core funding.
- That the Department of Education (DOE) provides adequate funding for the realization of the JEAP language and culture mandate.
- That DOE increases funding to YFNED (for K-12 schools) and YNLC for:
 - Curriculum and resource development
 - Language teacher training
 - Language proficiency and fluency development
 - Support to current language teachers' professional development
 - Providing resources so that fluent speakers, identified by YFNs, can be included in all aspects of programming
 - All FN language programs to have a fluent speaker and a trainee
 - Working with YNLC/CYFN to identify a process for any unallocated/un-hired language positions in Yukon schools; Explore possibilities such as TPA's to YNLC/CYFN or YFN's that are willing and have the capacity to direct local initiatives with the funds (CCOE, 2022).

Yukon First Nations Languages: Revitalization and Promotion Consultation Report

In 2008, First Nations leaders tasked the Council of Yukon First Nations and the First Nation Education Programs and Partnerships Unit (now First Nations Initiatives) to carry out a consultation for the purpose of developing a proposal with an "Action Plan" on Yukon First Nations languages revitalization and promotion. A summary of some of its recommendations follows:

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To produce and enhance fluency among motivated learners who already understand their language to some degree:
 - Master-Apprentice
 - Intensive community language classes
 - 'Language on the land and water' immersion
 - Archiving and recording languages toward revitalization
 - Language resources
 - Curriculum development
 - K-12 First Nation language education
 - Dialect variety and standardizations
 - Address training/education needs
 - Involvement of various institutions
 - Engage in language planning

Environmental Scan: Indigenous Educational Programs and Academies

The firelight group was contracted in 2021 by YFNED to conduct an environmental scan to better understand existing Indigenous education programs. The purpose was to explore the state of alternative and Indigenous-led education and approaches to teaching that are paving the way for Indigenous pedagogical revitalization. Based on their findings, the following recommendations were made:

RECOMMENDATIONS

In establishing Indigenous education programs in the Yukon, the YFNED should:

- Develop Indigenous education programs to meet the needs and goals of the community;
- Involve Knowledge Keepers, cultural experts, Elders, and caregivers in all aspects;
- Ground all aspects of a school or program in Indigenous culture and worldviews;
- Centre Indigenous pedagogies and methods of teaching;
- Create Indigenous-specific curricular content to align with Indigenous ways of knowing and being;
- Focus on language revitalization as a key means to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and being;
- Extend safe environments beyond the walls of the classroom;
- Train, hire, and retain community-based Indigenous educators;
- Measure success through holistic, flexible, and content-specific assessments (p.40).



Moving Forward

Culture and language have been, and continue to be, profoundly disrupted by colonial systems and structures. Many words, songs, practices, knowledge and traditions have been lost or silenced along the way. This has burdened present generations of Yukon First Nations people with cultural confusion, shame in not being able to voice one's mother language, and poorer health outcomes. Because we know that cultural identity and practice are both proactive and remedial, the urgency to revitalize and restore the wellbeing of culture and languages is now more than ever a critical endeavour. The task will enlist the expertise and collaboration of many, including Elders, speakers, Knowledge Keepers, leaders, linguists, teachers, educational institutes, non-profits, health care providers and governments. It will take place in language nests, in classrooms, around the kitchen table, and in environmental and digital landscapes. Ultimately, this concerted vision can ease intergenerational traumas, promote holistic healing, rebuild self-esteem, and restore cultural and linguistic pride (National Collaboration Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2016).

*I lost my talk
 The talk you took away.
 When I was a little girl
 At Schubencadie School.
 You snatched it away:
 I speak like you I think like you I create like you.
 The scrambled balled; about my word.
 Two ways I talk
 Both ways I say,
 Your way is more powerful.
 So gently I offer my hand and ask,
 Let me find my talk
 So I can teach you about me.*

- English Fruit, Rita Joe, 2013



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