



External Program Review for the
Following Their Voices
Initiative

June 2021

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Place-based Learning Services Inc.

Introduction

Following Their Voices (FTV) is an initiative designed to raise the educational achievement and participation of Saskatchewan's First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. FTV focuses on enhancing relationships between students and teachers, creating structures and supports for teachers and school administrators to co-construct teaching and learning interactions with students and creating safe, well-managed learning environments.

FTV is based on research that was conducted with First Nations and Métis engaged and non-engaged students, parents/caregivers, teachers and school administrators about what is needed in order to be successful as a First Nations or Métis student in school. The 'voices' of these groups of people were profound in terms of the issues they identified. Their words and insights, along with international research, and guidance and advice from Elders and Knowledge Keepers formed the foundation of this educational initiative.

FTV is committed to improving educational achievement and graduation rates for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students by increasing engagement between staff and students. It has been offering educational supports since 2014 through collaboration with Saskatchewan schools, First Nations education authorities and Métis education organizations. The initiative was provided support and direction from the Provincial Leadership Team during the Education Sector Strategic Plan from 2014-20. Beginning in 2014, this work has been operationalized in the Ministry of Education within the Priority Action Team.

In 2015, FTV welcomed 17 provincial and First Nations schools into the three-year implementation initiative, based on a modified train-the-trainer model (Fullan, 2005; Reeves, 2010; Killion & Harrison, 2006) that focuses on developing system leaders with a Strategic Change Leadership Team from each participating school. The FTV initiative attracts schools from urban and rural parts of Saskatchewan and provides a clear focus on building relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, creating secure, well-managed learning environments and engaging discursive interactions. There are clear indicators of strong relational ties to First Nations and Métis Elders from all language groups and regions of the province.

FTV has been successful in improving Indigenous student engagement and achievement. Over the past seven years (2014-21), engagement measures related to student-teacher relations are at or above provincial averages. As well, since 2015, there has been a 19 percentage point increase in credit attainment and a 2 percentage point increase in three-year graduation rates in FTV schools.

By the end of 2020-21, FTV has expanded to include:

- 52 schools, including 36 provincial schools, 15 First Nations schools and one joint provincial and federal school; and,
- 1305 school staff members and 790 teachers.

In the 2020-21 school year, there were just under 15,000 students in the initiative, almost 10,000 self-declared as First Nations, Métis or Inuit.

The Government of Saskatchewan has contributed \$8.65 million to FTV since 2014. In 2017, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada committed \$3.32 million to this initiative in a three-year funding agreement. Individual school divisions/schools have also provided funding support to the initiative.

Development of the Initiative

FTV began its development in 2013. It had its genesis in *The Joint Task Force Report on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People* (Government of Saskatchewan, 2013) when a promising educational practice from New Zealand was cited. Known as *Te Kotahitanga* (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai and Richardson, 2003), this professional development and research program identified ways that teachers and leaders in secondary schools could use pedagogy that was both culturally responsive and embedded in the principles of mutual trust and respect.

Significant interest in the *Te Kotahitanga* program led to a knowledge exchange with 13 Saskatchewan participants from across the education sector visiting New Zealand in the fall of 2013. Subsequently, the Ministry of Education commissioned a research study entitled *Seeking Their Voices: Improving Indigenous Student Learning Outcomes* (Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit, 2014). The study was to seek the voices of Métis and First Nations students, their parents/caregivers, teachers and administrators in an ethical space of engagement (Ermine, 2007). The themes that emerged stressed the importance of the student-teacher relationship accompanied by high expectations, the need for a culturally responsive pedagogy, as well as identifying the negative impacts of colonization, racism, assimilation and poverty.

In 2014, based on the aforementioned themes emerging from the *Seeking Their Voices* (Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit, 2014) research and the knowledge acquired through the *Te Kotahitanga* visitation, the Ministry of Education collaborated with a group of individuals from across the sector to develop a pedagogical response to the identified needs of First Nations and Métis students. The response was titled *Following Their Voices*.

A formal FTV Leadership Team was established with representation from First Nations and Métis education organizations, Elders, provincial school divisions and the Ministry of Education. In order to formalize the work, the Ministry of Education established the Priority Action Team. The Priority Action Team operates under the direction of the Ministry of Education and the FTV Leadership Team. Its primary task is to develop, organize and implement the initiative in provincial and First Nations schools in Saskatchewan.

Field Testing (2015)

From February to June 2015, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education funded a FTV field test involving one First Nation school and five provincial schools. The field test was planned to gather feedback from participants to identify possible refinements or adaptations to the FTV process and tools prior to implementation in 2015-16. Field test schools were identified through an application process and were selected from criteria which included student composition and geographic location. Each school was provided funding to attend provincial professional learning and development sessions and to cover the salary costs of a 0.5 full-time equivalent School-based Facilitator.

Year 1 (2015-16)

In the spring of 2015, seven provincial schools (in addition to the five original field test sites), and four First Nations schools (in addition to the one field test site) were selected to participate in the initiative (17 schools in total). Initially, these schools were solely funded from the Government of Saskatchewan yet midway through the year, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada provided additional funds to assist First Nations schools with implementation. The Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada funding allowed for a full-time School-based Facilitator to be employed at all participating First Nations schools, ensuring optimum school-based support to implement the initiative.

(17 schools total)

Year 2 (2016-17)

The initiative was expanded within existing schools by increasing the number of participating teachers in each school. No additional schools were added. To better support schools in their implementation efforts, the FTV website was launched. One First Nation school withdrew from the initiative.

(16 schools total)

Year 3 (2017-18)

Eleven additional schools were selected to join the initiative for the 2017-18 school year (six provincial, four First Nations schools and one joint provincial-federal school), for a total of 27 participating schools. With the increase in schools came the need to increase support resulting in two additional Provincial Facilitators being added to the team. The website was also expanded to include a private, authenticated portal. This secure access provides participating personnel with access to a calendar of scheduled events, an alert system, professional development resources, online tools, data and reports, a blog and discussion board.

(27 schools total)

Year 4 (2018-19)

In Year 4, FTV welcomed the addition of 13 new schools (eight provincial schools and five First Nations schools). Expansion also occurred in schools that were new in 2017-18 by onboarding

the remaining teachers. FTV now included approximately 570 teachers implementing the initiative in 38 provincial and First Nations systems.
(40 schools total)

Year 5 (2019-20)

In Year 5, the initiative was expanded within existing schools by increasing the number of participating teachers in each school. No additional schools were added. Also, based on participant input on ways to best meet the school-based outcomes, FTV decided to implement a four-year implementation model, adapting the previous three-year implementation framework. Participants appreciated the extended initiative supports as it ensured continued implementation and a focus on initiative sustainability.
(40 schools total - remained the same as 2018-19)

Year 6 (2020-21)

In Year 6, FTV added nine new schools to the initiative. The Saskatchewan education community was unfortunately affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. In response, the provincial and First Nations education systems ceased in-person activities in schools and had to consider different models of delivering teaching and learning to students. FTV adapted to ensure educational outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students remained a focus. FTV used the opportunity to pivot and began delivering all professional learning and development virtually. Staff developed a set of modules that provided further clarity and direction for the tools and processes. Participants were able to access these supports through the FTV website.
(49 schools total)

Guiding Vision

FTV is founded in the shared understanding that education promotes accelerated learning for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students where learning is joyful, culture is affirmed and students are given real choice for their future (Following Their Voices: A Developmental Journey, 2017). Through the Guiding Vision, three distinct effective practice themes emerged that support school success for Inuit, First Nations and Métis students. The themes are:

- Enhancing relationships between students and teachers.
- Developing structures and supports for teachers and school administrators to work together to improve teaching and learning interactions with students.
- Creating safe, well-managed learning environments.

As part of the Hearing Their Voices research process, FTV identified three *Understandings* and six *Indicators* that guide all work of the FTV initiative. The *Understandings* represent the perspectives or positions required of schools to foster the relationships, environments and interactions required to meet the needs of Métis, Inuit and First Nations students. The *Indicators* represent the actions that must be implemented by teachers and administrators to ensure learning is joyful, culture is affirmed and students are given real choices in their futures.

Together, the *Understandings* and *Indicators* form a powerful framework for all FTV processes and tools.

Throughout the development of FTV there has been a strong commitment to authentically involve Métis and First Nations Elders to provide guidance and oversight to ensure any pedagogical approach was grounded in Indigenous practices and ways of knowing. Twenty-four Elders and Knowledge Keepers from all language groups and regions of Saskatchewan (Cree, Dakota, Lakota, Nakota, Dene, Métis and Nakawe) are engaged in ongoing Elders' Gatherings, provincial professional learning and development sessions, FTV Leadership Team meetings and ad hoc committees. Their wisdom, experience and worldviews have been and continue to be invaluable to the implementation and development of the FTV initiative.

Teaching and Learning

The clearest area of strength demonstrated in every capacity was the incredible commitment, passion and care provided to the educators and students through the FTV initiative. There is extraordinary support shown by both the Leadership Team and the Priority Action Team, as was evidenced in provincial professional learning and development sessions and administrator and Provincial Facilitators' meetings. This was further evident during individual discussions with some key FTV leadership and administration in their optimism for sustained growth and a clear sense of direction.

Participants also noted the care that is exhibited by the Leadership Team and Priority Action Team throughout the initiative. There is a clear sense that the initiative structure is purposefully and attentively matched to the needs of students to those exemplary educators in the schools. Participants truly believed that all members of the Leadership Team and Priority Action Team wanted to ensure that each of the schools succeeded and were true advocates for their success. In this way, participants reported a number of ways in which the Leadership Team and Priority Action Team went beyond the normal expectations of professional development and support. This too was noted by the school administrators who provided clear support for students and teachers involved in the initiative and for some, during their continuation outside of the three-year initiative implementation cycle.

There is a strong context of cultural responsiveness embedded throughout the initiative that builds kinship and honors and validates traditional ways of knowing, as well as affirming diverse Métis, Inuit and First Nations cultures and practices. This is evidenced by the longstanding formal and informal engagement with Elders and other strategic Indigenous voices involved in all aspects of implementation. This includes the articulation of historical inequities of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and to critically examine their relationships and instructional approaches with Métis, Inuit and First Nations students by leadership, educators and students. Participants note the gatherings, professional learning and development sessions and Critical Learning Cycles as foundational in their teaching and learning.

Evidence and Quality

The FTV initiative relies on the collection and use of evidence to support changes in practice and ultimately lead to quality education and positive outcomes for students. To support the change process and provide meaningful data to participants, four tools (Observation Tool, Goal Setting Tool, Walk-Through Tool and Reflection Tool) and four surveys (Student Survey, Parent/Caregiver Survey, Teacher Survey and Strategic Change Leadership Team Survey) were developed. Initially developed as paper-based instruments and later converted to digital formats through the website, these tools provide real time information on engagement and provide major support for implementation.

The Critical Learning Cycle is a strategic and intentional cycle of learning facilitated for teachers throughout the year. The School-based Facilitators provide systematic and structured support to teachers that include: Observations, Goal Setting, Shadow Coaching, Huddles, Co-Construction Meetings and Classroom Walk-throughs. The participation results from these processes are tracked to help ensure schools are adhering to the scheduled activities in the Critical Learning Cycle over a school year and provide valuable feedback to both educators and Provincial Facilitators.

The FTV Surveys are customized, perceptual surveys used to inform school planning and reform. The surveys include questions about student-teacher relationships, interactions between students and teachers, and the learning environment. Parents/caregivers of FTV students are asked to complete a survey at the beginning and end of the school year. Students, teachers and Strategic Change Leadership Teams complete a survey three times a year.

Student engagement is critical to positive student outcomes (Deloria and Wildcat, 2001; Dewey, 1938; Emekauwa, 2004; Kanu, 2005; McLaughlin, 1992; O'Connor & Sharp, 2016, 2021). Many FTV schools participate in the OurSCHOOL perceptual survey that provides provincial and national comparators and the opportunity to determine progress based on an external data source. The following student engagement levels, as measured by OurSCHOOL, are above national median and replica school scores. In these measures, First Nations, Métis and Inuit students' perceptions are the same or slightly above their non-First Nations, Métis or Inuit peers in FTV schools:

- Effective Learning Time, Expectations for Success, Intellectual Engagement Composite, Positive Learning Climate, Positive Teacher-Student Relations, Values School Outcomes, Advocacy at School, Interest and Motivation, Relevance, Rigor

The following student engagement levels, as measured by the OurSCHOOL survey, are below national median and replica school scores. In these measures, First Nations, Métis and Inuit students' perceptions are the same or slightly lower than their non-First Nations, Métis or Inuit peers in FTV schools.

- Positive Relationships, Sense of Belonging, Feel Safe Attending this School, Aspirations to Finish High School, Effort, Truancy

Overall, the measures connected to the efforts teachers make to support students in the school are very positive. However, FTV will need to continue to address the measures related to interpersonal relationships between students and student safety in and around the school as they continue to be identified as a concern.

Student achievement and attendance are also strong points of measurement for FTV. The three-year graduation rates for all FTV schools have increased from baseline, but at a lower rate than that of the province over the same period. The five-year graduation rates for all FTV schools have increased from baseline at a higher rate than that of the province over the same period of time. Credit attainment rates for all the FTV schools have increased from baseline at a higher rate than that of the province over the same period.

It is important to note the provincial three- and five-year graduation rates have increased by a larger amount than seen over the past several years. It is likely that, in addition to improvements resulting from efforts of students, teachers and others, the greater increases are, in part, due to some policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Though currently anecdotal, the FTV Leadership Team shared that the cohorts of schools who have joined the initiative more recently, as the FTV initiative has matured, have demonstrated more growth and stronger results as compared to the first two cohorts of schools that joined at the onset of the initiative.

Role of FTV in the Community

FTV has evolved from a field test to a highly regarded provincial/First Nations collaborative educational initiative. As a unique Canadian educational initiative, it includes a combination of provincial and First Nations schools, and confers with a number of school divisions, First Nations and Métis education organizations and provincial and federal departments. This collaborative framework may prove to be a key differentiator in providing innovative pedagogical support within the FTV initiative. One example that was noted in discussions was the yearly Initial Gathering (online in 2021) that provides opportunities for Elders, stakeholders, teachers and educational administrators to meet and discuss educational outcomes from various urban, rural and remote areas of Saskatchewan. This is an incredible opportunity for providing teachers/students who wish to learn and share their experiences but have limited opportunities to disseminate their knowledge outside of their local communities.

From its inception and based on the input from the Seeking Their Voices research, parent/caregiver input has focused on the need to engage children in learning, the importance of caring teacher-student relationships with high expectations for success and building meaningful teacher-parent relationships. In the independent reviewer's discussions with the various participants, Elders, teachers and school administrators continued to reinforce the importance of the student-teacher relationship, the need for high expectations for all students, having flexibility in meeting student needs and culturally relevant learning.

Governance and Operation

Since its inception as a field test (2015), there has been a strong focus on governance and accountability. FTV consists of a Leadership Team and the Priority Action Team.

Mandate of the FTV Leadership Team

The FTV Leadership Team provides leadership, guidance and oversight for the research and development, implementation and sustainability of the FTV initiative.

Membership and Membership Terms

The FTV Leadership Team operates under the leadership of the Project Lead as identified in the Education Sector Strategic Plan's (ESSP) *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Student Engagement and Graduation Rate Outcome*. This work continues as the ESSP has drawn to a conclusion (June 2020) and a new Provincial Education Plan commences.

The FTV Leadership Team is comprised of a balanced representation from the following:

- Elders and/or Traditional Knowledge Keepers (2)
- Provincial school divisions
- First Nations education authorities
- Indigenous Project Lead (from a First Nations education authority)
- Accountable Partner (from a provincial school division)
- Métis education organization
- Ministry of Education, Deputy Minister's Office
- Ministry of Education, Priority Action Team Executive Director
- Project Manager

Additional considerations to FTV Leadership Team membership include:

- one at large member (can represent any of the organizations identified above); and,
- one member must be part of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Student Engagement and Graduation Rate Outcome team.

The FTV Leadership Team members serve for the duration of the project plan (usually three cycles, e.g., 2018-21). If representatives should depart prior to the completion of the term, a replacement may be considered to ensure continued balanced representation. If the individual represents an organization, the Project Lead of FTV will collaborate with the appropriate personnel to secure a replacement. Transition supports will be provided by the Lead with support from the Priority Action Team.

The Leadership Team includes members from First Nations education authorities and a Métis education organization Elders, provincial school divisions and the Ministry of Education. Of the three members who have chaired the Leadership Team and represent the initiative at sector

planning events, two have been senior leaders (director/superintendent) from First Nations education authorities. It is evident that the Leadership Team members provide stability and continuity given the changing landscape of education.

Priority Action Team

In order to operationalize FTV work, the Ministry of Education established the Priority Action Team. The Priority Action Team operates under the direction of the Ministry of Education and the FTV Leadership Team. Its primary task is to develop, organize and implement the initiative in provincial and First Nations schools in Saskatchewan.

The Priority Action Team conducts a variety of professional learning and development days that focus on school planning and professional development as was evidenced by the supporting documentation and the reviewer's attendance at the Initial Gathering. Further Priority Action Team activities include: monitoring implementation and outcomes, planning school goals and engagement processes, weekly school calls and school support. They are also tasked with supporting initiative accountability.

Initiative Management and Organizational Structure Staff Profile and Staff Morale

There is a reverence and continued optimism with respect to the initiative leadership found in the Priority Action Team and Leadership Team. It was noted that over a given period of time, there has been some turnover of the Priority Action Team, retirements and renewal among Provincial Facilitators that one would assume could lead to negative impacts on the facilitation of the initiative. It was shared with the reviewer that this is not the case, that based on the strong program and management structure, the framework is able to weather the changes in organizational supports and remains successful and innovative. As it was shared with the reviewer, "People come and go but the structure works and allows for sustainable success." Communication seems to be well placed among the FTV initiative in general, Leadership Team and Priority Action Team, and collaboration is prevalent among colleagues in the Priority Action Team, specifically amongst the Provincial Facilitators.

There continues to be unease about the sustainability of the initiative after the four-year implementation period, given the reliance on provincial funding and associated Priority Action Team supports. This also includes the potential retirements/turnover of some key leadership members who have provided stability over a number of years since inception and development of the FTV initiative.

The potential of the new secondments from school divisions and First Nations education authorities and the possibility of extending the initiative length and funding, does indicate some potential rejuvenation in engagement and morale.

Research Activities

There has been a considerable amount of programmatic research undertaken, led from a number of internal and external sources, over the past seven years. In a most recent instance, FTV has provided opportunities for graduate students to engage in research opportunities within the initiative.

There are emergent discussions about identifying best practices for all FTV schools and how to leverage the experience of previous FTV schools (those that have completed the three-year implementation period). A formal research program could investigate best practices and possibly support the development of a mentorship type of approach as 'veteran' FTV schools are paired with current or incoming 'new' FTV schools. These 'lessons learned' could be captured and shared as the initiative continues to develop.

A number of the members of the Leadership Team and Priority Action Team have considerable educational leadership experience and, most notably, possess graduate degrees with a considerable educational research background. Given this strong record of educational experience and research, the FTV initiative is well placed to bolster research and scholarship in the areas of Indigenous education, teacher training and education assessment and outcomes.

High Impact Practices

FTV includes a focus on teaching and learning informed by scholarship. FTV staff facilitate and support research on teaching. FTV teachers and students report on a suite of performance measures that are captured at the aggregate level, these metrics reflect teachers' and students' experiences of best educational practices. FTV uses the results of these assessment measures to assess academic challenge, student-teacher interactions, collaborative learning and supportive school environments. FTV has drawn on related research using data to inform the design of the initiative. In particular, Kuh's (2008) research is evident in that it identifies high impact practices that contribute to positive student experiences of retention, engagement and achievement.

THE RESEARCH- *Program Review Process*

The review process consisted of one external reviewer being invited to participate:

- Dr. Kevin O'Connor is Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Education, Mount Royal University, Calgary, Alberta.

It also included a University of Saskatchewan graduate student who, as part of her Applied Research Project, conducted an associated literature review and identification of related best practices (see Appendix A):

- Ms. Sophie Kirby, University of Saskatchewan, Governance and Entrepreneurship in Northern and Indigenous Areas

Documents and resources provided to the external reviewer included:

- 1) access to FTV Website (www.followingtheirvoices.ca)
- 2) research documents
- 3) master data sheets
- 4) initiative Surveys
- 5) initiative resources
- 6) annual reports
- 7) Following Their Voices: A Developmental Journey
- 8) FTV: Principals' Short Course
- 9) Following Their Voices Meta-Synthesis Report (February, 2021)

During the external program review process, the reviewer had the opportunity to have meetings with the following stakeholder groups:

- 1) Priority Action Team
- 2) Provincial Facilitators
- 3) Leadership Team
- 4) Principals/Vice-principals
- 5) Elders

The reviewer also attended the following events:

- 1) FTV Initial Gathering
- 2) Provincial Facilitators' Meetings
- 3) Priority Action Team and FTV executive meetings (weekly)

Note: See **Appendix B** for *FTV Working Directory*

The review officially began at the beginning of October, 2020, initiated by a systematic review of all relevant documents and a guided scan of the website and associated webtools. The reviewer was invited to weekly Priority Action Team executive meetings and monthly Provincial

Facilitators' meetings. This provided a more open forum for individuals to highlight the key strengths of the initiative and areas for building capacity. In all cases, the reviewer purposely allowed for an open forum for discussion and conversation, within a semi-structured interview format.

In December, 2020, the reviewer provided more purposeful and targeted questions at the various Priority Action Team and Provincial Facilitator meetings to gain better clarity and to gain deeper understanding for those issues that were still unclear. The reviewer then began to open the scope of discussions and invited various stakeholders to individual discussions. Based on those conversations, the reviewer did follow-up to inquire further or seek clarification as needed. The questions posed in the conversations were purposefully provocative and challenging to see where the reviewer could provide targeted recommendations with the intent to support the continued development and growth of the FTV initiative.

The comments contained in this external review result from data gathered through discussions, focused group conversations, website/webtools and document analysis. Feedback aligns, as much as possible, with the Terms of Reference provided in the original contract contained in *Schedule A- Specifications and Quality Assessment of Work*.

Accordingly, comments from the external reviewer outline a set of recommendations which include a sub-set of three areas:

- *Areas of Immediate Address;*
- *Areas for Continuation;* and,
- *Considerations for Future Direction.*

It is important to note that the reviewer did not have direct conversation with students but sought a summary of student input from various school representatives.

Drawing on the research involving self-study as a methodology for studying professional practice settings (Pinnegar, 1998), program improvement (Kosnick et al., 2006), and teacher education (Kitchen & Russell, 2012) and based on principles of self-study design (Dinkelman, 2003; LaBoskey, 2004), this review was self-initiated, focused on inquiry into teacher practice, collaborative, aimed at improvement of teacher practice, and using multiple and primarily qualitative means of inquiry.

This is the first external review conducted since the initiative's inception.

Recommendations

Areas of Immediate Address

Curriculum, Program Quality and Assessment Activity

Recommendation #1

- *Provide explicit focus in all documentation outlining the key underpinning philosophical principles of the FTV initiative.*

There is a clear institutional memory by key Priority Action Team and Leadership Team members who were part of the initial conceptualization and implementation of the FTV initiative. In discussions, stakeholders noted that the principles of the FTV initiative were based on:

- improving relationships between students and teachers;
- supporting teachers and school administrators to improve teaching and learning for students; and,
- creating safe and positive learning environments for students.

These principles were directly aligned with the original themes that originated from the Hearing Their Voices research in which FTV was developed upon.

While this appears to be present in the articulation by the FTV literature and in discussions with the Priority Action Team and Leadership Team, it is less apparent in the perspectives of some of the stakeholders, who speak for the need for ‘more focus on culture and language’ in the initiative, of ‘needing to have more Indigenous ways of knowing included’ and wanting ‘to bridge the two worlds of Indigenous and western forms of teaching and learning’. Making the key guiding principles more explicit to all participants (and revisiting them on a yearly basis) will help clarify and solidify the original initiative principles and hopefully foster the development of educators own educational philosophy. It with this intention that participants can further develop their articulation of the broader theoretical principles that underpin their practice and ultimately guide their understanding of teaching and learning.

Recommendation #2

- *Develop more nuanced, theoretical approaches that underpin teacher education.*

Fundamental and central to the initiative is the importance of quality instruction and the development and support for teachers that inform excellence in teaching and learning. This is a commendable goal and a strong differentiator among many other Indigenous education

programs in Canada. Interestingly, this articulated notion of a teacher professional development approach is not reflected explicitly in the *FTV Guiding Vision*. If this is a central component in practice, this ought to be reflected in the *Guiding Vision* and also specifically embedded in initiative outcomes (*Understandings and Indicators*). One suggestion might be to develop an initiative 'Mission Statement' that guides the procedural work. The development of a 'Mission Statement' could be undertaken as part of the response to Recommendation #3.

Recommendation #3

- *To make explicit the FTV initiative teacher competencies in the Understandings and Indicators.*

I recommend a program-wide mapping process as you review your initiative tools/modules/structure (see Recommendations #5, #8, #10, #13 and #17) and also in how these support the [Saskatchewan Teacher Certification Competencies](#) as set out by the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board. This could include engaging in a S.W.O.T. (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, Threats) analysis, specifically focusing on the professional learning and development sessions and the Critical Learning Cycle. It will be prudent to not only identify the Saskatchewan teacher competencies' inclusion in initiative curriculum but also how they are specifically enacted pedagogically by the individual teachers.

I was very impressed in how Priority Action Team/Provincial Facilitators were able to identify key teacher competencies yet I found some stakeholders struggled to elaborate or express rich descriptions and provide concrete examples in demonstrating an explicit understanding of the initiative teacher competencies, a key component for initiative success.

Meeting the Needs of Educators

Recommendation #4

- *Allow for mentorship opportunities for year-one cohort teachers to meet with year-two/three/four cohort teachers.*

The strength of this initiative is the small cohorts that include a relatively tight-knit group of teachers, with some showing strong levels of engagement. The Provincial Facilitators' meetings and provincial professional learning and development sessions provided an interesting opportunity for participants to discuss their experiences within their schools/educational contexts, and to provide informal mentorship and ease about the nature of the initiative.

The initiative may wish to create more purposeful gatherings to allow for informal and formal peer mentorship to occur between year cohorts, as teachers would most definitely benefit from listening to the voices and experiences of others who have recently been through the initiative.

Providing opportunities for teachers/students to showcase their work across the year cohorts may also model best practices as they enter the subsequent years of the initiative.

I recommend considering initiating a 'communities of practice' framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002) as a guide to these possible mentorship opportunities. Here, a community of practice is socially constituted and produces learning, thinking and knowing systems of relations among members. The forming of identities is enabled by and integral to these systems of relations; learning involves the shifting of identities within communities of practice (also see Recommendation #11).

Recommendation #5

- *Provide further opportunities for transition into the initiative.*

Stakeholders expressed that while mentorship and training was provided in preparing for initiative implementation, they voiced a concern that this was done with an overly rapid transition to implementation in which many new schools struggled to be successful in the first year within the initiative

The initiative may wish to reconsider the purposeful points throughout the initiative for participating schools to understand the transition within the initiative. This would help support and scaffold the initiative competencies that they will need to demonstrate when they report back to the initiative. Some examples to consider include:

- increase implementation readiness;
- facilitate veteran FTV teachers' recommendations/testimonials;
- engage in mock Critical Learning Cycles/reporting: and,
- debrief with previous cohort schools and include 'lessons learned'.

The initiative may also consider having teachers articulate their professional development and pedagogical learnings as they enter/leave the initiative (e.g., exit interviews). This will help with their own professional development and will hopefully lead to more success from each cohort as they transition into and from the initiative.

Program Alignment, Planning, Sustainability and Change

Recommendation #6

- *Conduct a review of the roles and responsibilities with respect to Provincial and School-based Facilitator positions.*

It is recommended that the initiative administration be attentive to some emerging issues related to the roles undertaken by the Provincial and School-based Facilitators. In a relatively small initiative that promotes innovation, often facilitators are asked to take on various

responsibilities that are not always clear in their delineation and also can lead to overload and loss of work-life balance.

In my discussions, I was privy to some subtle, yet no less significant, examples of overlap on Provincial Facilitators responsibilities to that of School-based Facilitators' roles. I believe the initiative would benefit in the short and long-term in reviewing school-based and administrative roles and how those roles relate to the initiative vision and implementation plan. The review and redistribution of the roles and responsibilities as it relates to both positions within the initiative will be helpful in providing clarity for all the participants. This will help create a sustainable staff plan that ensures success and support for all involved.

Recommendation #7

- *The creation of a 'Distributed Leadership Model' in creating more initiative structure and stability.*

The initiative benefits from strong leadership and extensive experience and support for innovative programming, partnership development and a K-12 approach to the scholarship of teaching and learning. It was evident not only in discussions with the Leadership Team and Priority Action Team, but also supported by the discussions with stakeholders in the initiative. The FTV initiative is guided by a strong network of administrators who appear to work well together and support each other in the continual development of the FTV initiative.

With that being said, committed administration is only one piece of a successful leadership framework. For the initiative to be successful and sustainable, all participants must see their shared role and responsibility in initiative fidelity and within the learning process.

It is recommended that the FTV initiative consider developing a 'distributed leadership model' where teachers are acknowledged as highly respected professionals. Efforts have been made in Finland, Singapore and Canada to strengthen connections between theory and practice and develop quality teachers with the capacity to provide excellent and accessible education for all students. To do so, Finland has prioritised the implementation of high-quality initial teacher education "that integrates research and practice" (Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 292). In Singapore, a highly developed performance management system has been implemented that generates a range of leadership opportunities throughout a teacher's life-long career (Darling-Hammond, 2017). The approach adopted in Canada has been a commitment to strong standards with a focus on improvement and capacity building instead of punishment (Darling-Hammond, 2017). These international examples align with what Sachs (2016) and Bourke (2019) describe as the difference between managerial professionalism, which is concerned with performance and accountability, and democratic professionalism, which involves "collegial relations and collaborative work practices" (Sachs, 2016, p. 419). Transformation to democratic professionalism, they argue, is predicated on a commitment to ongoing professional learning,

deep engagement in research and collaborative practices throughout the teaching profession (Bourke, 2019; Sachs, 2016).

It was clear that the collegial school culture, established and supported by the school leadership, plays a crucial role in each participants' involvement in the FTV initiative. This aligns with Andreasen et al.'s (2019) assertion that "leadership support and trust [is linked to] higher levels of organisational citizenship and willingness to voluntarily go beyond minimum job obligations" (p. 3). The FTV initiative will benefit from continued development of a shared responsibility for leadership that empowers participants to be active and accountable leaders within the initiative.

Recommendations

Areas for Continuation

Curriculum, Program Quality and Assessment Activity

Recommendation #8

- *Further streamlining the initiative tools and reporting mechanisms to provide consistency and coherence across the initiative.*

There is significant evidence that the Priority Action Team has responded to the call to “improve efficiencies” and reduce “reporting burden” for participants over time. I wish to encourage further development given the current spectrum and quality of reporting.

As Priority Action Team members continue to refine and develop the Critical Learning Cycle tools and reports, I recommend that key themes and competencies be made explicit in the tools that are deemed critical throughout the initiative. For example, you may wish to have a section that articulates how ‘Indigenous worldviews and perspectives and culturally relevant principles of learning’ will be made overt in specific activities. Similarly, you may wish to make explicit which reporting section addresses certain key teacher competencies. This will foster educators’ greater awareness of how each of these key principles are embedded throughout the initiative. It will also provide evidence to the School-based and Provincial Facilitators how the educators will demonstrate these teacher competencies throughout the initiative.

Recommendation #9

- *Be attentive to the development and expansion of new schools/teachers with respect to Priority Action Team/Provincial Facilitator workload, without it compromising the nature of the relationships that make it successful.*

A real strength evident in the initiative meetings/gathering, and also in my discussions with stakeholders, is the personal attention and close-knit relationships that are developed within the initiative. This speaks to the passion and dedication that a provincial/First Nations education collaboration, such as the FTV initiative, embodies.

I commend the Priority Action Team and Provincial Facilitators for their dedication and commitment, but also warn of the dangers that can develop when passions and innovations outweigh time, workload and personal work-life balance. Specifically, as it relates to the development of new school tools and also yearly new school cohorts, I suggest a deliberate full Priority Action Team/Leadership Team consultation and review of staff responsibilities and commitment, as this could have significant impacts on the very aspects that make the initiative

so unique and successful. 'Small' IS good and a specific strength of the FTV initiative. The caution is to respect and honor this strength as the FTV initiative continues to develop and possibly expand the scope and breadth of programming.

Recommendation #10

- *Continue to develop a more fulsome conceptualization and implementation of initiative assessment and dissemination, i.e., develop more partnerships and opportunities for school administrators, School-based and Provincial Facilitators to present and disseminate their work more broadly (with other schools, school districts, local, provincial and national conferences).*

A number of indicators suggest that research and innovation is occurring at the administration level. In collaboration and with mentorship from the Priority Action Team and Leadership Team, some teachers spoke of the increased innovation and willingness to build upon the framework of 'teacher-informed research'. A few of the stakeholders also noted that they were currently or intended to pursue graduate studies in education.

There may be an interest/opportunity to implement an 'action research' course for all participants or possibly even develop a cohort of teachers in collaboratively pursuing a M.Ed./M.A. Given this interest, opportunities to create teacher/school research showcases would create a broader impact to the broader community. Consideration and support for teachers to attend [Canadian Society for the Study of Education CSSE](#) and [American Educational Research Association AERA](#) education-focused conferences and local and regional teacher specialist areas meetings would also amplify the interest to bolster the research efforts among teachers and school administrators.

This could be best achieved by considering having post-secondary education representatives as part of the Leadership Team. Partnerships could include having post-secondary collaborations (also see Recommendation #13 and #17) in K-12 schools that may include teacher field experiences/practicum, i.e., the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) in-service and pre-service students in FTV schools.

Program Governance and Resource Use

Recommendation #11

- *Continue to increase the capacity of Provincial Facilitators/secondments to further strengthen the initiative.*

When a new seconded position is onboarded, or as current Provincial Facilitators assess their own skills and responsibilities, consider increasing the capacity of Provincial Facilitators to find place-based opportunities and work collaboratively with communities. As often mentioned in

the Provincial Facilitators meetings, as opportunities arise in individual schools/boards, it is key to have timely support and mentorship.

The Provincial Facilitators are key players in the success of the initiative and the bridge between Priority Action Team, Leadership Team and school communities. Therefore, an opportunity exists to formally develop 'communities of practice' and inquire into how a specific Provincial Facilitators cohort can become an engaged learning community (Beck & Kosnick, 2001, 2006; Bullough et al., 2001; Connor & Killmer, 2001; Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006; Rainer & Guyton, 1998).

The perspective of learning as increasing participation in communities of practice is embedded in a relational understanding of knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This socio-constructivist theory of learning defines communities of practice as "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (p. 98). According to Wenger, participation in communities of practice is where learning takes place. Similarly, Beck and Kosnick (2006) state, "In a socio-constructivist view, community is not just a frill; it is fundamental to effective learning" (p. 74).

Wenger (1998) links the formation of communities of practice (also see Recommendation #4) with three participatory dimensions: *engagement*, *accountability*, and *negotiation*. *Engagement* is dependent on developing an understanding of how to interact with other people within the community. Becoming *accountable* to an enterprise, for example improvement in student learning of mathematics, prompts members to consider certain possibilities that contribute to aligned perspectives of the world. Wenger refers to *negotiation* as the ability to interpret and make use of a repertoire of the community's practice.

I further recommend that continued professional development and support be provided to all Provincial Facilitators to continue to build their capacity as allies and as Indigenous peoples, so that they do not only rely on Elders and Knowledge Keepers to the neglect of their own personal and professional growth.

Recommendations

Considerations for Future Direction

Curriculum, Program Quality and Assessment Activity

Recommendation #12

- *Authentically integrate Indigenous worldviews, perspectives and culturally relevant principles of learning in all programming that correspond with Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Calls to Action on education (2015), Government of Saskatchewan- Education Sector Strategic Plan's (ESSP) First Nations, Métis and Inuit Student Engagement and Graduation Rate Outcome (2014) and Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework (2018) (or other similar and applicable guiding documents).*

The FTV initiative would benefit from an “Indigenization of the Curriculum” mapping exercise that would entail the systematic review and alignment of initiative learning, activities and assessments as they relate to the initiative’s *Understandings* and *Indicators* and as facilitated through the professional learning and development sessions and Critical Learning Cycles.

There is an opportunity to gather multiple perspectives and understandings as it relates to the teaching and learning process and in further defining educational achievement. This would require multiple perspectives and representation from the various participant organizations. While consensus may not always be attainable, I believe the process will deliver valuable learnings that will lead to increased teacher engagement and further student achievement. This process could also be a template for other organizations (regional, provincial, federal) who seek to respond to the increasing demands for indigenization, decolonization and reconciliation efforts within K-12 and post-secondary education environments.

Recommendation #13

- *Ensure that the FTV initiative is responsive and aligned with any broader changes occurring with the Government of Saskatchewan’s curricula and teacher education practices.*

During this review, it is unclear how the FTV initiative has responded to curricular changes within the Government of Saskatchewan’s provincial curricula. It is further unclear whether teachers have a sense of the changes that are currently in place with respect to curriculum reviews or broader teacher pedagogical practices. As one stakeholder commented, in relation to the Saskatchewan curricula, “it’s the same as it has always has been, it never really changes”.

There appears to be little evidence of how teachers are addressing the changes in their profession or developing an awareness of how the changes will impact their own teaching profession. One recommendation is to create a space to discuss how policy impacts teaching practice, with specific reference to the changes occurring at the provincial level. The second is for teachers to develop the ability to articulate the new areas of emphasis related to pedagogy that is demonstrated and embedded in their teaching practices. These discussions could be co-facilitated with the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and provincial post-secondary faculty/college of education (see Recommendations #10 and #17).

Recommendation #14

- *Assessment seems to be an area of further development.*

The current research and practices in assessment seem to be an underdeveloped aspect of the schools. Some stakeholders provided only high-level understandings of assessment, and often commented that this was just a secondary component of a teacher's job. There is also the possibility that assessment data is not being used effectively to inform practices. Information technology does not seem to be a focus for some schools, specifically in the area of literacy. Whether this is reflective of the larger cohort is unknown, but it does suggest a need for further development in this area and a further review of high impact practices (Kuh, 2008) as it relates to assessment and evaluation. Some key principles that you may wish to consider include:

- design principles and features of authentic performance assessments;
- principles and features of high-quality rubrics;
- alignment between high-quality assessment tasks, rubrics and assessment for learning; and/or,
- rationale for adopting sound grading and reporting practices.

I recommend that there is a clear component that is made explicit and woven throughout the initiative, articulating the theoretical principles that underpin recent research in assessment. I further suggest that this is made a priority in the initiative *Understandings* and *Indicators*, which also models the teachers' own assessment practices in the school.

Acknowledging the strength of the FTV performance measures currently in place, there is opportunity for schools to benefit from the data collected to inform the school's broader teaching and learning practices.

Recommendation #1

- *Continue to bridge the theoretical underpinnings that guide the pedagogy; be explicit with your teachers about how it aligns with their aims and values; be clear about their implicit understandings/actions.*

With the strong practical and reflective component in the initiative-level teacher outcomes, I recommend that this be balanced with some of the broader theoretical principles that underpin these practices. Anecdotal comments from stakeholders note that there are attempts to make connections between the theoretical foundations to more practice-based teaching. Again, this ought to be made explicit to teachers throughout the Critical Learning Cycle. For instance, if teachers are being asked to ‘support the diverse needs of students in classrooms’, the initiative should provide the key supports/concepts that underpin the practices, (e.g., differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, etc.).

I envision this can be done through a scaffolded approach that begins with provincial facilitators who then facilitate to the school level by school-based facilitators. This will better prepare teachers to understand how these principles frame how educators create supportive classroom environments. This will also further assist teachers to demonstrate their understanding as they report back to the initiative.

Program Alignment, Planning, Sustainability and Change

Recommendation #16

- *Develop a blended FTV initiative targeting students who reside in both provincial and First Nations schools in Saskatchewan.*

The FTV initiative is well placed to provide an integrated/blended First Nations/provincial schools FTV cohort that could serve both urban/rural Saskatchewan communities. It is recommended that the initiative explore other provincial/First Nations education partnerships that go beyond traditional ‘sharing resources’ models (e.g., see Alberta’s Northern Lights School Division First Nations partnerships, Dr. Colin Kelly).

Some possible examples include providing shared professional learning and development at various sites, with the ability to offer online Critical Learning Cycle debriefs for teachers during the school term, this provides opportunities for collaboration and the possibilities for synergies beyond individual regions and/or school divisions.

Considering the student movement that occurs between local First Nations schools and provincial schools in rural communities, this might increase equity and access for students. It would also potentially be more responsive to contexts where there is a current demand for more teachers in rural areas than in urban areas. In responding to the impact COVID-19 has had on the teaching and learning process, there is now well-established online learning capabilities implemented across educational sectors that provides numerous opportunities and increased infrastructure in facilitating online collaboration.

Recommendation #17

- *FTV has an opportunity to inform current teacher education programs by strengthening partnerships with Saskatchewan post-secondary teacher education programs (e.g., University of Regina, University of Saskatchewan, SUNTEP, etc.). This could be achieved by providing a FTV course/module for new teachers with the potential for practicum opportunities or even jobs.*

The FTV curriculum is intended to support both disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning, encourage culturally responsive pedagogy, and enable strong research-focused teacher development.

In this review, the potential for the FTV initiative to revitalize the teacher education field is glaringly evident. With the ever-developing calls for more Indigenous content and world views in provincial curriculum (i.e., Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Calls to Action on Education, Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board- [Saskatchewan Teacher Certification Competencies](#) and Government of Saskatchewan's Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework) and the lack of supports/understandings for teachers to enact these important concepts, FTV is well-placed to assist teacher education programs in better preparing teachers for the complexities of the classroom today (see Recommendation #10 and #13).

The FTV initiative has a tremendous opportunity and the necessary partnerships to undertake such an endeavour and meet the increasing demand for culturally responsive teachers in the education field. This is an exciting opportunity that most provincial education programs in Canada cannot offer.

Third space school-university partnerships, such as those seen in Green, Tindall-Ford and Eady (2020), can be one strategy for enacting this research-focused teacher development. These “collaborative partnerships . . . result in collective wisdom” (Bourke, 2019, p. 40) with teachers and teacher educators sharing and co-creating knowledge and developing mutual understandings and expertise will open up further opportunities and synergies for all educators (K-12 and post-secondary education institutions).

Recommendation #18

- *Scaffold and ladder FTV certification that would recognize accomplishments and promote engagement in teachers.*

The FTV initiative currently provides training to both teachers and school administrators. In both instances, the Priority Action Team may wish to consider developing a scaffolded certificate process that would be part of the larger FTV initiative implementation.

A consultative review would be required to ensure that the integrity and key principles of the initiative would be maintained and supported without compromising the current successful work that is being done by all participants involved. However, a key differentiator would be to augment the engagement level of teacher/school administrators (and possibly school support staff, e.g., learning assistants, etc.) so that those who have completed the various levels of certification would naturally progress to further opportunities with the intent of becoming FTV leaders and beyond.

Some examples could include:

- certificate of accomplishments (scaffolded design);
- increased responsibility/leadership opportunities (see Recommendation #7); and/or,
- supports for further educational training opportunities (e.g., diploma/degree tuition, conference registration)

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Appendix A- Ms. Sophie Kirby, Literature Review and Case Study

Appendix B- FTV Working Directory

Schedule A- Specifications and Quality Assessment of Work