

FOLLOWING THEIR VOICES

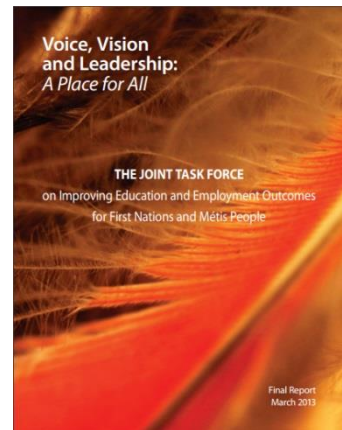
A Developmental Journey



Following Their Voices: A Developmental Journey

The Origins: Joint Task Force and Te Kotahitanga

Following Their Voices (FTV) is an evolving iterative initiative that began its developmental journey in 2013. It had its genesis in *The Joint Task Force Report on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and People* (2013) when a promising educational practice from New Zealand was cited. Known as Te Kotahitanga (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai & Richardson, 2003), it was a professional development and research program that 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. The program rejected deficit explanations for the achievement of students of Māori descent and supported the development of teaching profiles where teachers believed in their capability to affect positive change in students from cultural minorities. Referred to as agentic discursive positioning, it involved the development of “... caring and learning classroom relationships and interactions, and shifts in classroom practice from a predominantly transmission approach to a more interactive or discursive model” (Bishop & Berryman, 2010). The professional development program assisted teachers in critically evaluating their principles and practices in relation to Māori students and how they could use their own agency to make a positive difference in student achievement.



The Te Kotahitanga program generated much discussion and significant interest among leaders in the First Nations and provincial education systems leading to a knowledge exchange with 13 Saskatchewan participants from across the education sector visiting the program in New Zealand in the fall of 2013. The Saskatchewan contingent was very impressed with the way in which the program was developed and implemented and, most importantly, with the improved Māori student achievement results that it attained (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter, & Clapham, 2011).

The Foundations: Seeking and Hearing Their Voices

Upon returning to Saskatchewan, 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

“The introduction of a common space configured at the confluence of two worldviews illustrates the concept of an ethical space that opens channels for the negotiation of ethical cross-cultural interaction.” (Ermine p. 35)

seek the voices of Métis and First Nations students, their parents/caregivers, teachers and administrators in an ethical space of engagement (Ermine, 2007). Contextualized within a Saskatchewan Indigenous student perspective and similar to the research utilized in the creation of Te Kotahitanga, the researchers used focus groups and interview methods to seek the voices of students, caregivers and staff from both provincial and First Nation schools. The transcription and analysis of the voices, coined Hearing Their Voices, also included gathering feedback from Elders.

Students, identified as engaged or non-engaged in their school experience, expressed few differences about negative experiences revolving around stereotyping, racism, bullying and intimidation in school environments. They indicated that school had more meaning when teachers demonstrated genuine concern for learning and that students not only understood the material but had opportunities to apply their skills. They expressed wanting teachers to really care about them and honour them as Indigenous peoples and to help them feel safe in class and throughout the school. Students also reported wanting to feel that their teachers believed they could be successful in school.

“I think it all comes down to your relationships with your teachers. How strong it is or not and a relationship is a big factor with your grade, I think.”
Student Participant: Seeking Their Voices

Parent/caregiver voices corroborated the student voices on engaging children in learning, the importance of caring teacher-student relationships with high expectations for success and building meaningful teacher-parent relationships. Teacher and administrator voices further reinforced the importance of the student-teacher relationship, high expectations for all students, flexibility in meeting student needs and culturally relevant learning.

“I think relationship is key ... That’s kind of the biggest thing, that’s what I think keeps our students coming back even after, maybe they don’t experience success in one block they will still come and give it a shot again . . . because they have that relationship with not only the students but also the staff here.”
Teacher Participant: Seeking Their Voices

As part of the study, the researchers also conducted interviews with prominent national and international academics, policy leaders and administrators. Again, common themes 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.

Following Their Voices Emerges

Based on the salient 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 (FTV).

An advisory committee, made up of representatives from First Nations education organizations, the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, the Ministry of Education, provincial school divisions, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents, the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan was also established to provide advice and perspective on development of the response.

Building a Critical Mass: Broad Partnerships and Inclusion in the Education Sector Strategic Plan

Concurrent with the developmental work on FTV, the provincial education sector was engaging in a sector wide strategic planning process. The process resulted in the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) to provide overall direction for the Prekindergarten to Grade 12 provincial system. Initially a generic statement, the First Nations, Inuit and Métis improvement strategy formally incorporated FTV into the ESSP as a Priority in February 2015.

“In partnership with FNM stakeholders, implement the Following Their Voices Initiative (Phase One).”
(Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2015)

As well, the ESSP established a formal Long Term Outcome for the achievement of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students that states:

“By June 30, 2020, collaboration between First Nations, Métis and Inuit and non-First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners will result in significant improvement in First Nations, Métis and Inuit student engagement and will increase three-year graduation rate from 35% to at least 65%.” (Education Sector Strategic Plan)

The inclusion of FTV in the ESSP was an important step in ensuring a critical mass of participating schools with the momentum and commitment to shift pedagogical practices and ultimately attain the desired provincial outcome. Information acquired from the New Zealand

knowledge exchange had identified the importance of a critical mass of schools to ensure continued progress and expansion (M. Berryman, personal communication, 2015).

Inclusion in the ESSP also enabled FTV to formalize its relationships with a broad range of stakeholders. 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. Of the three priority owners 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 organizations.

In order to operationalize this 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.

Elders: From Guiding Vision to Ongoing Involvement

Following Their Voices Guiding Vision

Education that promotes accelerated learning for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students where learning is joyful, culture is affirmed and students given real choice for their future.

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. In the fall of 2014, an initial Elders' Gathering was held at the Wanuskewin Heritage Park, just outside Saskatoon, to gather advice and direction from a representative group of Elders from all language groups and regions of the province.

At the Gathering, the Elders confirmed a Guiding Vision and provided advice and direction on the development of the Understandings and Indicators, helping operationalize the initiative. It was through the support, advice and guidance of the Elders that the Guiding Vision and Understandings and Indicators became the foundational underpinnings of FTV.

“You need to listen to their culture, their belief system and you will understand . . . then you can help the students. Before that you can't help them 'cause they don't understand you and your culture and most times your language. Listen, learn and understand.”

Mary Lee, Cree Elder

During this gathering the Elders also noted that there were no references to Inuit students. A recommendation was put forward to ensure the inclusion of Inuit people in all future FTV work.

Ongoing formal and informal engagements with Elders continue to be held, including annual Elders' Gatherings. Elders provide regular advice and input into the initiative and are actively involved in provincial and school-based professional learning and development sessions.

Understandings and Indicators

As part of the Hearing Their Voices research process, three distinct effective practice themes emerged that support school success for Inuit, First Nations and Métis students. The themes were: enhancing relationships between students and teachers; creating structures and supports for teachers and school administrators to work together to improve teaching and learning interactions with students; and creating safe well-managed learning environments. This work resulted in the identification of three Understandings and six Indicators that have served to guide all future work for the initiative.

The Understandings represent the perspectives or positions required of schools to foster changed relationships, environments and interactions to better meet the needs of Métis, Inuit and First Nations students. Subsequently, the Indicators represent the actions that must be implemented by teachers and administrators to ensure learning is joyful, culture 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.

Understandings

Education that is relational and culturally responsive demonstrates:

1. A focus on responding from within areas of influence.
2. A commitment to continuous learning, unlearning and re-learning.
3. A change in practice that accelerates achievement for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.

Indicators

Evidence of these understandings can be demonstrated by the following indicators:

1. Caring for and believing in First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and their cultures.
2. Having high expectations that Inuit, Métis and First Nations students are self-determining, can participate and can achieve.
3. Creating secure, well-managed learning environments.
4. Engaging in teaching and learning interactions that are responsive to student interests and needs.
5. Using a range of strategies to promote accelerated growth.
6. Using evidence from Métis, First Nations and Inuit student outcomes for critical reflection and for identifying strategic actions that promote accelerated growth.

The FTV Process

During the Te Kotahitanga knowledge exchange the Saskatchewan delegation learned how a job-embedded teacher research and development program was implemented in schools. Combined with the Seeking Their Voices research and the Elders' guidance, this knowledge resulted in a 'made-in-Saskatchewan' teacher instructional model. The model includes:

- a foundational understanding of the FTV Guiding Vision and the Understandings and Indicators;
- teacher observation and feedback;
- individual teacher instructional goal setting based on feedback;
- teacher group goal setting to strategically support First Nations, Inuit and Métis student achievement;
- Shadow Coaching to support the development of relational and culturally responsive pedagogy;
- weekly staff Huddles to support progress towards achieving individual and group goals;
- teacher reflection on progress towards goals; and
- an emphasis on the importance of data to influence strategic decision-making.

The model provides a clear focus on building relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, creating secure, well-managed learning environments and engaging discursive interactions.

Professional Learning and Development

Envisioned as a rolling three-year implementation, FTV is 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. Comprised of a division/education organization lead, a principal, a School-based Facilitator (selected from the teacher cohort) and a lead teacher, the Strategic Change Leadership Team receives intensive professional learning and development (Guskey, 2000) in FTV practices.

The school is provided funding for the School-based Facilitator position to work directly with participating teachers in supporting, observing, monitoring and providing feedback as they implement a range of discursive, culturally responsive instructional strategies (Killion & Harrison, 2006). Utilizing a gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Fisher & Frey, 2008) the Strategic Change Leadership Teams are provided extensive professional learning and development support and in turn provide this to their schools. Each team uses this acquired knowledge to support an initial cohort of teachers (approximately 10) at their school. In each of two subsequent years, another cohort of teachers joins the initiative, resulting in full school implementation over a three-year time frame for most schools.

The FTV professional learning and development initiative is embedded in a context of cultural responsiveness that builds kinship and honours and validates traditional ways of knowing, as well as affirming diverse Métis, Inuit and First Nations cultures and practices. It was designed to enable teachers to better understand the 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. Within this context, strategies for engaging discursive instruction are introduced, modeled and practiced. The strategies encourage student feedback that links to prior knowledge, co-constructing knowledge and ‘feed-forward’ responses that promote future learning (Bishop & Berryman, 2010).

“... FTV has supported our staff in a renewal of instructional strategies, relationship development and commitment to our students. The processes to support FTV, such as Huddles, PLD sessions and classroom observations have ensured that teacher isolation at our school is a thing of the past.”
Administrator,
Following Their
Voices school, 2016

Critical Learning Cycle

To support teachers in the acquisition of relational and culturally responsive discursive strategies, a cycle of activities provides teachers with ongoing observation, feedback, modeling and peer support. Led by the School-based Facilitator and based on the instructional coaching principles of Knight (2009), teachers are observed once per cycle. Their use of strategies and the resulting engagement of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students are documented. At the end of the observation, selected First Nations, Métis and Inuit students are asked to provide feedback on the amount of work completed and how much new learning occurred during the lesson.

The observation data is compared to the FTV Indicators and used by the teacher in setting an individual improvement goal. Teachers also work collaboratively in co-constructing a group goal, participate in classroom Walk-throughs to support the changes in practice, and, at the end of a cycle, reflect on the degree to which goals were attained. School-based Facilitators support these processes by having Huddle meetings with groups of participating teachers to discuss progress and Shadow Coach individual teachers to provide support and guidance. In the first year of implementation this seven to eight-week cycle is repeated five times over the course of the school year, with longer and fewer cycles in years two, three and beyond.

Tools

The collection and use of evidence to support changes in practice is well documented in the literature (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). To support the change process and provide meaningful data to participants, four tools and four surveys were developed. Initially developed as paper-based instruments, and later converted to digital formats, the tools and surveys include:

1. Observation Tool – used by School-based Facilitators to gather evidence of discursive instruction and student engagement and shared individually with teachers to inform improved practice.
2. Goal Setting Tool – used by teachers for setting individual improvement goals based on observation feedback. It is also used by teachers to set a common group goal for improvement.
3. Walk-through Tool – used by School-based Facilitators in week five of every Critical Learning Cycle to conduct brief Walk-throughs in classrooms and identify examples of progress toward individual and group goals.
4. Reflection Tool – used by teachers in week seven of the Critical Learning Cycle to reflect on personal progress toward individual goals. This tool collates data from the Observation Tool, Goal Setting Tool and the Classroom Walk-through Tool.
5. Surveys: Student Survey, Parent/Caregiver Survey, Teacher Survey and Strategic Change Leadership Team Survey – used by the school and the division/education organization throughout the year to provide perceptions and inform progress.

The data from these tools and surveys form a frame of indicators (Kaplan, 1996) that capture changes in teacher practice that advance improvements in course completions, course marks and graduation rates.

Field Testing

From February to June 2015, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education funded an FTV field test involving one First Nations education organization 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 professional learning and development sessions and to cover the salary costs of a .5 FTE School-based Facilitator.

Field Test Schools (January – June 2015)

- Blaine Lake Composite School – Prairie Spirit School Division
- Scott Collegiate – Regina Public Schools
- Wesmor Community High School – Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division
- Bedford Road Collegiate – Saskatoon Public Schools
- E.D. Feehan Catholic School – Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools
- Eagleview Comprehensive School – Onion Lake First Nation

The Ministry of Education was also able to second a Provincial Facilitator to lead and support the schools in the field test. Although using a compressed timeline of training and implementation, the field test demonstrated significant promise. Student, community and staff feedback was positive and demonstrated the importance of pursuing the initiative on a larger scale and over a longer time frame.

Innovation Configuration Maps

The field test emphasized the need to bring enhanced clarity to the interpretation and application of the Indicators. Using the concept of innovation configuration maps (Hord, Stiegelbauer, Hall & George, 2006; Richardson, 2004), six Indicator Innovation Configuration Maps were created in collaboration with a Knowledge Keeper, teachers and administrators

from field test schools. The maps describe the component parts of each Indicator and a pathway to its implementation. Designed as a professional support and not an evaluative instrument, the Indicator Innovation Configuration Maps provide behavioural descriptions of teachers progressing through the implementation stages of awareness, exploration, synthesis and refinement.

Innovation Configuration Map Excerpt			
Indicator 1: Caring for and believing in First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and their cultures			
Effective teachers of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students demonstrate they care for and believe in First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and their cultures by:			
1.1 Component: Knowledge and Understanding			
Refinement	Synthesis	Exploration	Awareness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeking to develop a deep understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories and worldviews both inside and outside of school. Demonstrating in-depth appreciation of the cultural knowledge of their students and families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeking to develop an understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories and worldviews inside of school. Demonstrating appreciation of the cultural knowledge of their students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrating basic knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories and worldviews. Demonstrating general appreciation of the cultural knowledge of their students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrating limited knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories. Demonstrating limited appreciation of the cultural knowledge of students or their families.

The Indicator Innovation Configuration Maps brought a heightened focus to the importance of the professional learning and development sessions and the supportive resources that would be required to advance the FTV Indicators.

Implementation

Year One: 2015-16

In the spring of 2015, an application request to schools for the initial FTV implementation identified 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). Initially, these schools were provided funding from the Government of Saskatchewan. Midway through the year, the priority owner and the Priority Action Team shared information on FTV with Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). Following this meeting, INAC decided to provide additional funds to assist First Nations schools with implementation. The INAC 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.

The FTV application process required that schools identify their interest and willingness to join the initiative and confirm the support and commitment of their division/education organization. More than thirty schools submitted applications, but available resources limited the acceptance to seventeen schools representing urban, rural, First Nations and provincial locations.

To support the increased number of schools, two Provincial Facilitator positions were added to assist a Lead Provincial Facilitator position (previously established to guide the design and field test stages).

As well as receiving extensive professional learning and development, all the new Strategic Change Leadership Teams were provided access to four surveys (Student Survey, Parent/Caregiver Survey, Teacher Survey and Strategic Change Leadership Team Survey) and three data gathering and monitoring tools (Observation Tool, Goal Setting Tool and Walk-through Tool). At this time a software development and solutions services company was contracted to digitize the surveys and tools. To assist in accessing and employing the digital tools, each participating school was provided with a computer tablet(s).

Year 1 (2015-16) Schools

- Bedford Road Collegiate – Saskatoon Public Schools
- Blaine Lake Composite School – Prairie Spirit School Division
- E.D. Feehan Catholic High School – Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools
- Eagleview Comprehensive School – Onion Lake First Nation
- Scott Collegiate – Regina Public Schools
- Wesmor Community High School – Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division
- Bert Fox Community School – Prairie Valley School Division
- Cando Community School – Living Sky School Division
- Charlebois Community School – Northern Lights School Division
- Constable Robin Cameron Education Complex – Beardy’s and Okemasis First Nation
- Kamsack Comprehensive Institute – Good Spirit School Division
- Keeseekoose Chiefs’ Education Centre – Yorkton Tribal Council
- Mount Royal Collegiate – Saskatoon Public Schools
- Minahik Waskahigan School – Northern Lights School Division
- Raymore School – Horizon School Division
- St. Louis School – English River First Nation
- Sturgeon Lake Central School – Sturgeon Lake First Nation

Year Two: 2016-17

The 2016-17 budget year was marked by a weakened provincial economy and grant reductions to many human service institutions and agencies. Although there was considerable interest in joining the implementation shown by schools, funding restraint meant that no additional schools could be added. One First Nation school requested a leave of absence, resulting in the cohort being reduced to sixteen schools. As part of the ongoing implementation plan participating schools expanded to include an additional teacher cohort to reach an increasing number of First Nations, Inuit and Métis students.

Interjurisdictional work on FTV implementation continued with INAC recognizing the value of the initiative by providing three years of funding to support implementation in First Nations schools. In addition, a First Nations Schools Liaison position was created to support the unique needs of First Nations schools as they implement the initiative. The First Nations Schools Liaison coordinates communications with First Nations education organizations, liaises and communicates with Elders and Knowledge Keepers and supports interjurisdictional work.

To better support schools in their implementation efforts, an FTV website was launched. The public portion of the site was developed to provide information to increase awareness of the initiative in the education sector and with the general public. A fourth data gathering and monitoring tool was added, the Reflection Tool, to allow participating teachers the opportunity to reflect on work toward individual goals and the degree to which each are achieved.

Guided Inquiry projects were also added in 2016-17. Led by Provincial Facilitators the inquiries identified and examined features of the implementation that could be enhanced through further professional learning and development. Intended as an annual development, the process ensures an ongoing examination of the ways in which Provincial Facilitators can improve supports to schools and strengthen the implementation.

Year Three: 2017-18

Eleven additional schools were selected to join the initiative for the 2017-18 school year, 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.

Year 3 (2017-18) Additional Schools

Provincial Schools:

- Carlton Comprehensive Public High School – Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division
- Churchill Community High School – Northern Lights School Division
- Ducharme Elementary School – Northern Lights School Division
- John Paul II Collegiate – Light of Christ Catholic School Division
- Rossignol High School – Ile a la Crosse School Division
- Stobart Community High School – Prairie Spirit School Division

First Nation Schools:

- Canoe Lake Miksiw School – Canoe Lake Cree First Nation
- Chief Gabriel Cote Education Centre – Cote First Nation
- Cowessess Community Education Centre – Cowessess First Nation
- Keeseekoose Chiefs' Education Centre – Yorkton Tribal Council

Joint Provincial and Federal School:

- Sakewew High School – Battlefords First Nations High School Joint Board of Education

In order to ensure consistency in the administration of the initiative, an FTV Administrative Procedural Guide was produced for 2017-18. The guide provides direction to the administration and implementation of FTV. It is designed to be an iterative document that will be updated as needed to reflect improvements while maintaining fidelity to the Understandings and Indicators, practices and processes of the initiative. Like all other major undertakings, Elders provided guidance and direction in the vision and development for the Procedural Guide to ensure it honours and respects Indigenous teachings and worldviews.

In addition, 2017-18 saw the introduction of Readiness Innovation Configuration Maps to better prepare schools, divisions and First Nations education organizations with the initial implementation year. Created with the input of Elders and staff from divisions/education organizations, the Readiness Innovation Configurations Maps provide a clear set of actions and practices to advance school planning. In a corresponding development, work began on aligning and tracking outcome measures (lag measures) with high impact teacher actions (lead measures) most connected to the achievement of FTV goals (McChesney, Covey & Huling, 2012).

Elder input and advice continues to be an important element of FTV developments. On the recommendation of the Elders, 2017-18 saw the introduction of an annual Elders' Blessing. The ceremony is to honour participants and to ensure the initiative continues to move forward in a good way.

A concluding highlight for 2017-18 marks a significant milestone for FTV: the completion of the first full three-year implementation cycle for the original cohort of sixteen schools. Direct financial support for the cohort will be sunsetted at the conclusion of the school year following three years of funding. These schools will transition into a maintenance mode as they continue to advance FTV practices and demonstrate instructional leadership in their region.

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