

Indigenous Learning Initiative

Engagement Summary Report

Indigenous Scholars

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Prepared in partnership with:



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) completed a cross-country engagement as part of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. The 2015 final report of the TRC issued a Call to Action for all levels of government to provide education to public servants on the history of Indigenous peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration), Treaties and Indigenous rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations.

In her July 7, 2015 mandate letter to Cabinet, Premier Notley outlined her expectation for a renewed relationship between the Government of Alberta (GoA) and Indigenous peoples in Alberta. In that letter, she asked each Minister to conduct a review of GoA policies, programs, and legislation that may require changes based on the principles of the UN Declaration, in line with Alberta law and the Constitution of Canada.

The GoA is committed to offering a quality, culturally-appropriate suite of learning opportunities for Alberta Public Service (APS) employees and public agencies, boards, and commissions (ABCs). Therefore, two departments – the Public Service Commission (PSC) and Indigenous Relations (IR) – are co-leading the engagement, which will inform the development of an Indigenous Training Proposal (led by PSC). This engagement will ultimately lead to the delivery of mandatory Indigenous introductory training for the APS and ABCs for the first time, and could include as many as 400,000 staff. To do so, a partnership was established (March 2017) with the Faculty of Native Studies and Alberta School of Business at the University of Alberta. This partnership is to gather input and insight from Indigenous knowledge keepers, educators and scholars, as well as other participants identified by Indigenous communities and organizations to inform the content and delivery options for Indigenous introductory training to APS employees and ABCs.

The overall objective is to have a more informed public service regarding Indigenous peoples and Indigenous issues, and to use principles from the UN Declaration as the main policy framework for this work. This can lead to improved program and service development and delivery where Indigenous people will benefit by accessing programs and services that are respectful and appropriately delivered. The public service will also benefit from being more informed to effectively carry out its work.

This summary report communicates the results of the three Indigenous Educator Scholar meetings that took place in May and June 2017. It will provide the Indigenous framework for learning, principles for the learning, goals for the training, learning objectives, modes of delivery, and scalable content that has been identified during these meetings. It will convey the main themes, final thoughts, and discussion items that have been raised by the group.

PROCESSES AND ACTIVITIES

Currently, there are several programs being offered within the GoA that relate to Indigenous introductory training; the GoA is considering how these programs can be streamlined and wants to ensure that all staff are receiving adequate training. To develop a GoA Indigenous learning framework, the Indigenous Educator Scholars meetings began by reviewing and evaluating Indigenous awareness training models from the Government of Canada, Alberta Education, and the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada. The strengths that were identified from these models include the importance of holistic learning, multiple entry points, shared leadership, relationships with Elders, cultural advisors, and Indigenous communities, and attention to diverse learner backgrounds.

Guiding principles were discussed using a “sticky note exercise” where participants wrote down phrases and words that described **important principles for GoA’s framework**. General themes that emerged include:

- Being critical and uncomfortable, where necessary, to ensure that hard truths are discussed and self-reflection takes place.
- Being practical and relevant.
- Being adaptable and agile.
- Ensuring the process is respectful, collaborative, open, inclusive, authentic, and multifaceted.
- Accountability is very important. The training needs to be accompanied by evaluation and measurement to demonstrate commitment and ensure there is action, sincerity, and long-term thinking.

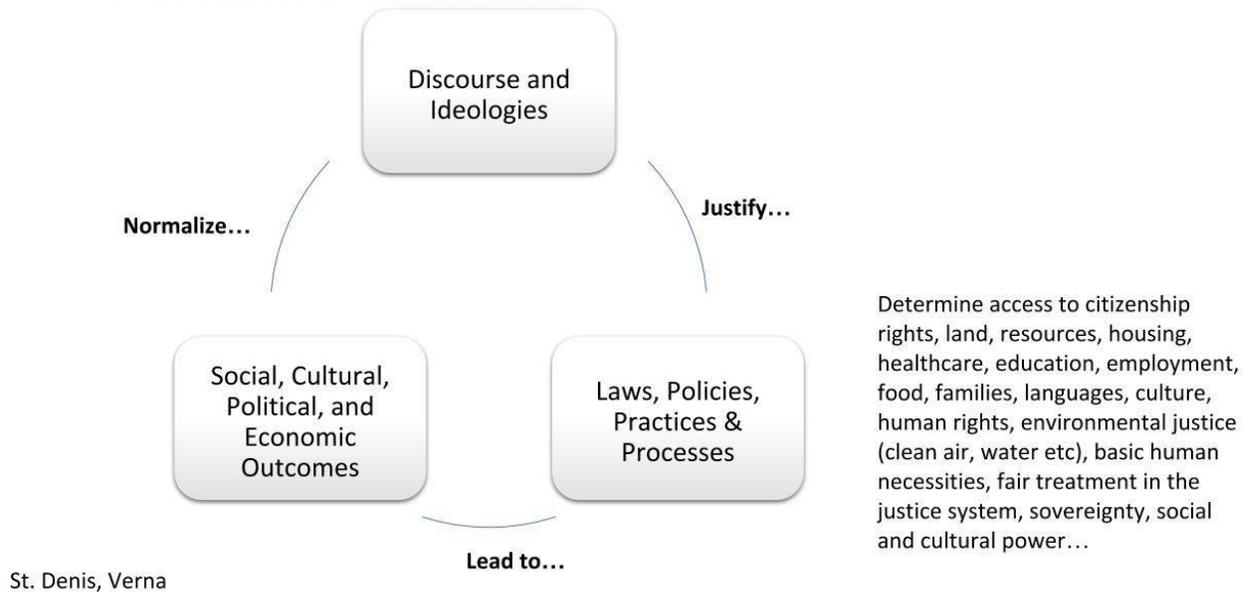


An integral part of the training will be understanding how GoA and Canadian culture and worldviews are often normalized and understood to be universal, while simultaneously dismantling the myths and assumptions often held about Indigenous peoples. Conventional Indigenous awareness training has focused on learning about Indigenous peoples and cultures. The group discussed the importance of understanding Indigenous nations as societies, to bring about greater understanding, dismantle hierarchies, and change relationships for the betterment of all Albertans. This will require new, unconventional curriculum to understand how our histories bind us together in the present. Therefore, the focus should be on our collective responsibilities. It was noted that a fundamental part of the training is to understand how culture contributes to the formation of values, which in turn determines behaviours. The resulting behaviours greatly influence the type of relationships that take place. The group identified that having curriculum to address GoA and Canadian beliefs and values would be imperative so that the curriculum does not strictly relate to behaviour and become ineffective.

Dr. Verna St. Denis elaborated on this conversation by providing the group with a model of structural determinism (below). This is a concept that has been developed by critical race theorists¹, and it relates to the group's discussion about societal culture, values, behaviours, and relationships, because it demonstrates how ideologies contribute to tangible, material outcomes. The societal ideologies and discourses in Canada greatly influence the policies, laws, practices, and processes that are implemented. These policies, laws, practices and processes lead to outcomes (social, cultural, political, and economic) that can reinforce and normalize the original discourses and ideologies that started the cycle. (There are social, cultural, political, and economic aspects as a part of every society.) Worse, these outcomes can deepen the discourses and ideologies in a counterproductive or erroneous way.

These models visually demonstrate how the cycle works. The first is a general model and the second is a model that represents how the cycle can be disrupted by reconstructing knowledges:

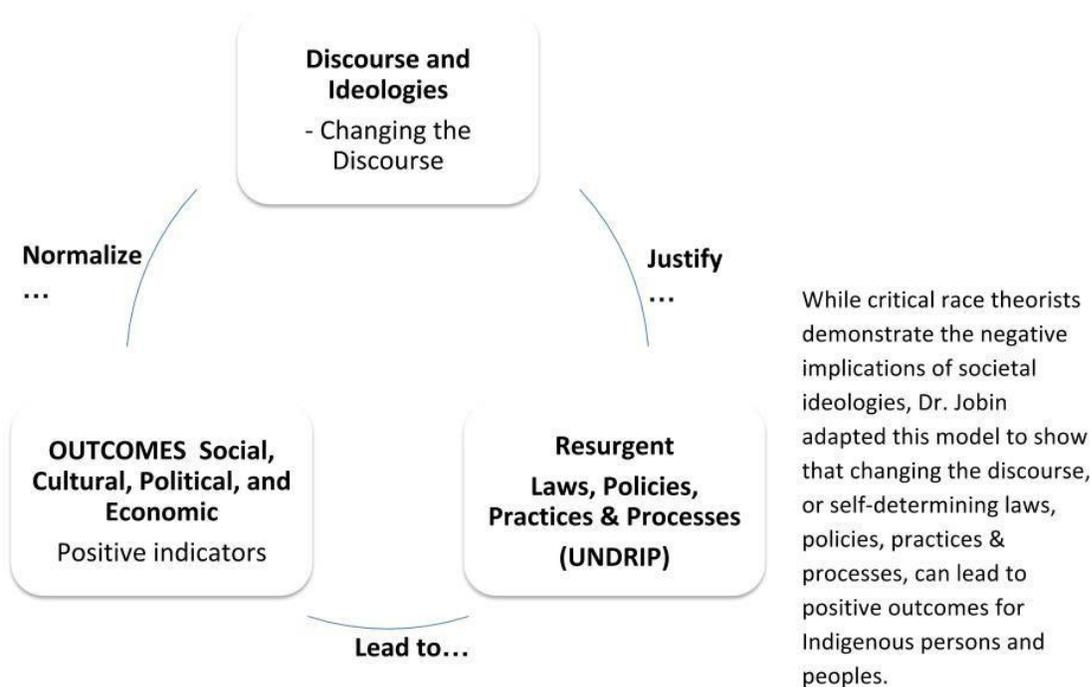
Structural Determinism



¹ Further reading on structural determinism:

- Gillies, C. (2017). *A critical race analysis of Métis teachers and racism in Saskatchewan schools*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.
- Delgado, R. (1984). The imperial scholar: Reflections on a review of civil rights literature. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 132, 561-578.
- Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- St. Denis, V. & Schick, C. (2003). What makes anti-racist pedagogy in teacher education difficult? Three popular ideological assumptions. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, XLIX (1), 55-69

Reconstructing Knowledges



Adapted from Dr. Verna St. Denis

Reconstructing Knowledges

The second “sticky note exercise” addressed the **components that would be important for the learning**. The general themes that emerged include:

- Experiential learning that includes: 1) interactive, online components, 2) group work, such as breakout and discussion activities, and 3) classwork that has instructional time.
- Communities of practice to ensure that next steps (the “now what?”) are addressed.
- Assessment tools to evaluate and improve the training, measure results and have accountability.
- Modules that relate to employee job functions with unique learning based on the person.
- A de-colonial aspect.
- Teaching about political, economic, cultural and social relationships.
- Teaching about legal relationships.
- Individual self-reflection and identity work (see structural determinism).
- Strategies to transform build and maintain relationships between the GoA and Indigenous peoples, using collaboration.
- Foundational learning – having a starting place to start the learning.

Overall, the group felt that the **goals of the training** are to 1) increase awareness, appreciation, and understanding; 2) build connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; 3) start and continue the conversation about reconciliation; and 4) bring about tangible improvements in the lives of Indigenous peoples with GoA employees changing the way they do business.

Thereafter, it is hoped that employees will develop a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous peoples and the surrounding issues and, consequently, develop a desire to learn more. While increasing employee awareness, competency, sensitivity, and understanding is important, the group felt that the naming of the program should steer away from using these terms, as they problematically convey an emphasis on culture and Indigenous peoples and do not evoke the totality of what needs to be learned. We discussed moving beyond awareness toward the implementation of behavioural changes (through providing training that is holistic and applied). This is a decision-item that will need to be addressed going forward, but other suggested names for the training program included “Changing the Discourse” and “Indigenous Learning Framework”. The Indigenous introductory training program name could differ from the naming of the individual training programs that are contained within the Indigenous Learning Initiative.

In order for this to be most successful, it is felt that each Deputy Minister, Assistant Deputy Minister, and Executive Director should be trained first in order for knowledge to be diffused from the leadership level out to the rest of the staff. In a practical sense, this ensures that employees can approach their supervisors and converse about topics that they both know. It also contributes to Indigenous learning becoming actionable and personal within each employee’s work responsibilities.

As a result of these two exercises, the group agreed to four statements that amalgamate and articulate the results into **principles for learning**:

- A program with integrity that is an ongoing conversation and has concrete accountability for outcomes.
- Indigenous communities are central to this framework. The primary objective is to create conditions that are more supportive towards thriving relationships and self-determination.
- Delivered with a practical aspect that is engaging and suitable to different learners dependent on their roles and responsibilities within the GoA.
- Led by Indigenous worldviews and voices to support respectful relationships, takes a critical stance to expand the thinking of participants, and facilitates courageous, sincere change.

It will be important to create space within employees’ work so that they apply their learning, remain accountable, and have further dialogue together, possibly through the development of **communities of practice**. Suggestions include hosting “lunch and learn” sessions and having sharing circles as a second part of the learning. This would provide employees with a forum to share how they will apply their learning, and allow time for reflection and processing of the learning before sharing in the group.

The third question the group addressed related to learning objectives. The **learning objectives**:

1. Learn Indigenous worldviews, perspectives, and voices in a way that braids Indigenous and Canadian worldviews. This would be intersectional and could take a common approach with the concept that non-Indigenous peoples in Alberta have benefitted from historical and contemporary agreements, like the treaties. Consequently, there are responsibilities today and we all share in reconciliation.
2. Develop an understanding of facts, historical research and contemporary events, policies, and laws.
3. Deconstruct and reconstruct the discourse by using an Indigenous counter-narrative to explore myths and create continuing effects for student learning.
4. Construct greater appreciation for Indigenous societies and issues by using a strengths-based view that will confront the deficit-based lens often applied to Indigenous peoples.²

The curriculum will emphasize Indigenous resiliency and agency to circumvent sympathetic or distancing responses from GoA employees that could reinforce the idea of othering. It will also demonstrate how Indigenous peoples have had strength in spite of so many barriers.

The fourth question the group addressed related to the **modes of delivery**.

Technology

Technology was identified as a useful tool that could be an option to consider but, taken together, the use of technology received mixed feelings from Indigenous scholars for the foundational course. One option was a multi-modal delivery for the foundational course that would include online and face-to-face learning. Online learning could be developed with chat-rooms and moderators that would ensure that there is opportunity for dialogue. Notably, this would be a safeguard so that employees are learning well and have accountability for their results. This would ensure that authentic learning is not bypassed due to it being disembodied. There are several benefits to using technology. First, online infrastructure may require less monitoring for the GoA and, second, it allows people the time and space to decompress, preventing students from feeling 'on-the-spot' or pressured by comparison to face-to-face, classroom learning. Third, the scope of the training is within a workplace setting. Therefore, people may approach it carefully due to the context (i.e. that it is being offered within their role as an employee). Accordingly, initial technological training could be considered as an option, especially if there was a homework piece that students could take away and apply to their work. Currently, the GoA has Zoom technology and it is a program that could be used due to it being successful in delivering other training programs.

There were several reasons to consider face-to-face delivery instead of an individual, computerized module for the mandatory training piece. It was felt by some that the online mode of delivery created artificial distance and anonymity. This mode can be turned off or given less attention than when an employee is face-to-face in a classroom setting. Also, it was expressed that the mode of delivery should not be decided solely based on the cost.

The GoA's willingness to invest in the Indigenous introductory training financially will signal commitment and demonstrate a level of seriousness.

² Utilizing a strengths-based approach can curtail employees' responses that may include paralysis, guilt, and regret. These responses can become counterproductive if they do foster positive, applied actions that contribute to strengthening Indigenous societies.

To bridge the diversity of opinions on technology, one possibility is to offer the initial learning in an individualized, computerized platform because it would only involve introductory content. Then, as the learning spectrum becomes broader and deeper, the training could be delivered in a more collective, face-to-face, experiential manner with a high level of training provided by Indigenous knowledge holders. Regardless, with all stages of the learning, the content and type of learning instruction will need to be well-rounded. This will ensure that cognitive, applied, experiential, relational, and empathetic learning is included and takes place in order to affect the most change. To do so contradicts conventional learning that is more heavily weighted with cognitive learning and it is more consistent with Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Mandatory element

While the training would be mandatory within the GoA, and could become entrenched in legislation to ensure its continuity, the group discussed the importance of rolling it out in such a way that employees do not feel too defensive or forced, to gain the greatest level of buy-in. However, adding this mandatory training would not be exhaustive, as the GoA currently only requires Occupational Health and Safety and Information Technology training. Therefore, it was felt that making it mandatory and embedding it in the system conveys the high level of commitment the GoA is taking. It could be introduced as just one element of the employee's work performance and become normalized over time.

Notwithstanding, it was pointed out that people like to be able to choose what they want, so pre-assessment quizzes were suggested as a way to demonstrate employees' pre-existing knowledge. Another way could be to make it more personal by having supervisors discuss the training with employees during their annual reviews as a part of their professional development planning. The Indigenous Learning framework provides a path of learning opportunities depending on the staff member's responsibilities and roles related to Indigenous peoples.

As the training will be mandatory, it will be important to manage the various levels of risk associated with divergent employee backgrounds. For example, there will be different emotional responses across the spectrum of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff who take these courses. To manage this well, it will be important to begin the training at the mandatory course level, as this will have a greater emphasis on cognitive learning, before taking coursework that will have a deeper level of relational, applied and empathetic learning.

Range of employee learning

The group felt that it was important to differentiate the mandatory training (through tiers, strands, or a spectrum) from the specialized training. The breadth of training GoA employees take should be linked to their workplace relationships with Indigenous peoples and communities. In other words, all employees do not require the exact same training. Divergence across work functions and roles will shape which competencies each employee will require. The group agreed that using this form of assessment, based on responsibilities and roles, is a good way to identify what training each employee requires by contrast to assigning training to employees based on seniority or job grade.

Instructors

There are aspects of the teaching that should remain under Indigenous control and authority, such as ceremonial and cultural teachings, where qualified Indigenous instructors would have the sole responsibility. It will be important to follow specific protocol when asking Elders to come and lead aspects of the training. Therefore, the GoA may want to develop an Elder policy or look at the University of Alberta's policy

regarding Elder protocol to ensure that traditional knowledge is respected and valued. Regarding smudging, the GoA may want to consider increasing the accessibility in government buildings for smudging to take place without restrictions. Non-Indigenous instructors were felt to be important for other aspects of the material in order to demonstrate and model partnership and reconciliation where co-instruction with an Indigenous instructor would be welcome. The recommendation was made that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous instructors could deliver some of this material in partnership.

It was mentioned that having experts present some of the material is beneficial and the GoA should be attuned to Indigenous knowledge holders and other expertise in choosing who delivers the material. While the training will not want to overburden Indigenous scholars and knowledge holders who are already fully engaged in other endeavours, there are many Indigenous people that are qualified to do this work. Perhaps hiring new Indigenous employees that have this expertise would be beneficial to deliver some of the training. Taking a course or reading the facilitator's guide does not make a person qualified to teach. There have been instances in the past where initiatives were started, initially with Indigenous employment, that subsequently replaced Indigenous staff with non-Indigenous staff. It is hoped that this training program will have safeguards in place to ensure this does not occur.

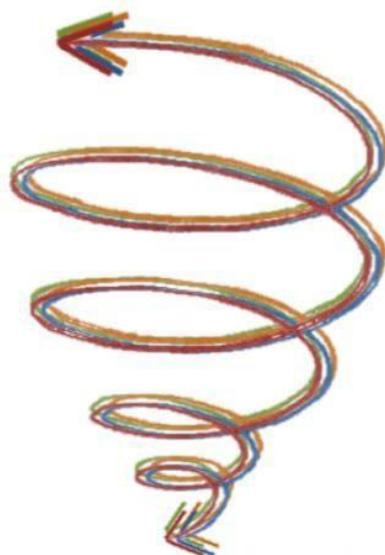
FRAMEWORK AND CONTENT

The group discussed how to visually represent the training in a model. Circles and movement were seen to be important to demonstrate the ongoing, non-static nature of the learning process that sometimes requires 'circling' the same categories and content several times before reaching a deep level of understanding. Employees will be taking in the counter-narrative from Indigenous perspectives through an approach that encourages bi-directional learning.

- As the learning is a two-way conversation, it constructs and deconstructs knowledge concurrently, so a spiral framework was decided upon. This is depicted with arrows that go up and down.
- The spiral framework demonstrates learning from two different angles - from the side of the spiral and from the top, looking down.
- From above the spiral, there are circles of learning that become larger as the employees' learning deepens.

Spiral Framework (side view)³

Indigenous Learning Framework



Legend:
Cultural
Social
Political
Economic

The scalable content will range from basic to more advanced curriculum on four aspects that include the cultural, social, political, and economic realms. This is not an exhaustive list, but it reinforces how the training curriculum will include all four aspects (that are part of all societies) rather than solely focusing on culture, as has conventionally been the case in training about Indigenous peoples. These aspects of society all have legal and policy implications. The four aspects are defined here:

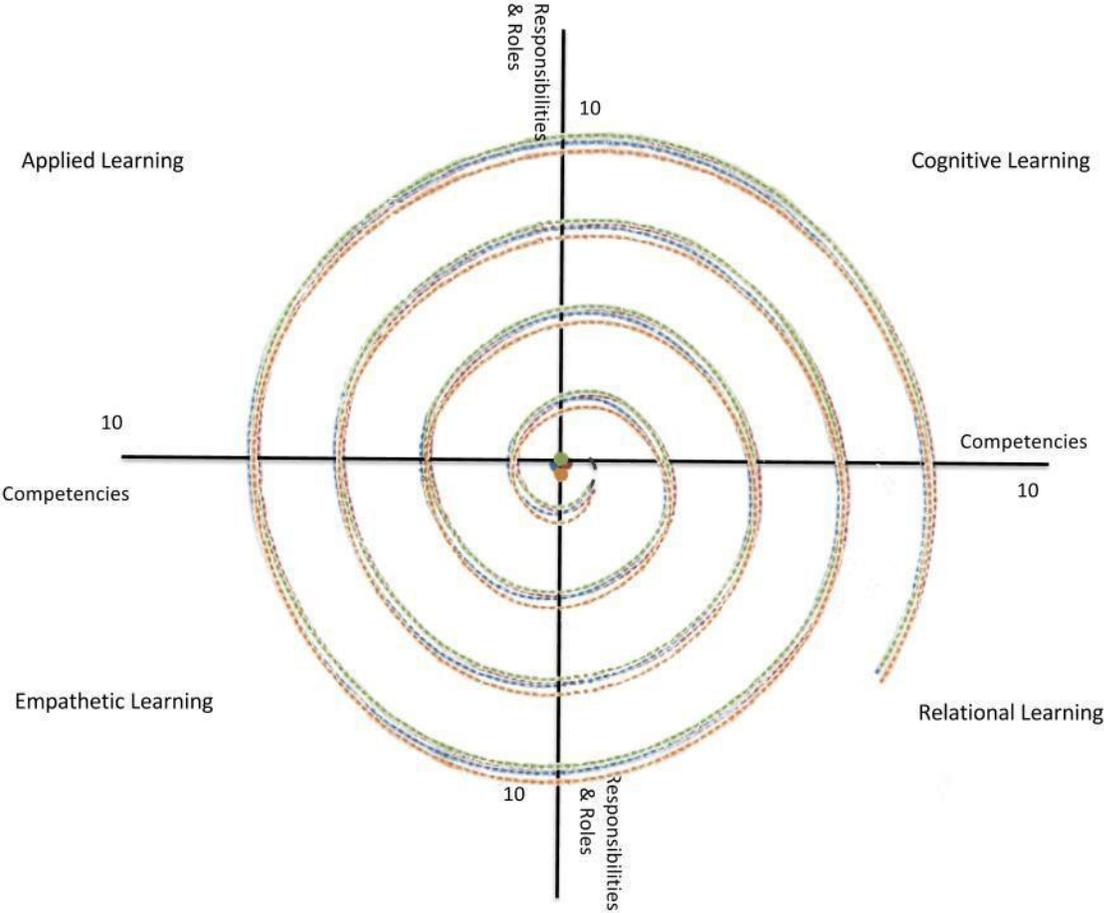
1. Cultural: the cultural aspect relates to common beliefs, values, and relationships in communities. This could be reflected in things like ceremonies, food, art, dance, music, and language.
2. Social: the social aspect relates to education, health, kinship, family programs, and social behaviour in communities.
3. Political: the political aspect relates to governance, including elected councils and leadership, decision-making, intergovernmental relationships, and dispute resolution processes.
4. Economic: the economic aspect relates to financial and resource management, economic development, technology, and employment.⁴

³ This graphic was created by Dr. Shalene Jobin with wisdom provided during the Indigenous Scholars dialogue process.

⁴ These aspects are derived from the Métis Settlements General Council, 2016 Strategic Summit.

Importantly, these four aspects of scalable content are intertwined and overlap with one another (see above), rather than operating in silos. This content could be multi-modal for both the initial, mandatory learning and the more specialized learning to deliver holistic training.

Spiral Framework (top view)⁵



There are four different quadrants that represent modes of delivery-cognitive, relational, empathetic, and applied. A cognitive mode of delivery informs employees about facts, historical research and contemporary events, policies, and laws. A relational mode of delivery teaches about the interrelatedness of humanity, animals, and the environment. It helps employees develop effective relationships with Indigenous persons and peoples. It can incorporate ceremony, cultural and spiritual teachings, and attendance at events. An empathetic mode of delivery includes testimonials, documentaries, art exhibits, and stories.

This mode of learning helps move information from ‘the head to the heart’ to facilitate transformative learning. An applied mode of delivery integrates hands-on application, facilitates employee creativity and innovation, and fosters implementation of the learning, as praxis learning, in individual work roles. It could

⁵ This graphic was created by Dr. Shalene Jobin with wisdom provided during the Indigenous Scholars dialogue process.

involve joining a community of practice or doing an action learning project. Using this multi-modal approach ensures that the learning is holistic and does not solely concentrate on cognitive learning, such as facts and 'school' curriculum.

The spiral framework has various sizes of circles, depending on the breadth of learning that the employee will require, that can be plotted along the quadrants. The breadth of learning is determined by the intersection of the "x" and "y" axis on the diagram above. This is assessed by considering the level of competency each employee requires for their work role and their related responsibilities with Indigenous peoples. If mandatory training is required, the circle will be small and will cover a basic amount of material within the quadrants. Nonetheless, the four aspects of content will ideally be covered (social, economic, political, and cultural), and the learning objectives will be adhered to in accordance with the principles of learning. If specialized training is required, the circle will be large and will cover the maximum amount of material to equip employees with specialized competencies. For example, if an employee has a high amount of responsibility (e.g. an executive) and a high degree of relationship with Indigenous communities, then their learning journey might correspond to a level 10 competency requirement on all four modes of learning.

The foundational learning could be placed within the first circle of competency and would ideally engage with cognitive learning, empathetic learning, applied learning, and relational learning. Some training may include only one quadrant of learning, but for new courses being developed, ideally all four quadrants of learning would be included. The dotted spiral can also represent the community of practice within the GoA, where the individual's learning journey is in community with other employees through formal events, informal events, and ongoing groups that are formed.

FINAL THOUGHTS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

Continuous engagement: The GoA will engage with Indigenous scholars and communities in further meetings to determine how this training should be delivered. It was noted that diversities need to be represented, and it is especially important to involve youth and to have contributions from different First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. Geographic representation should be included in this process, in addition to communicating with Indigenous universities and colleges.

Long-term security of the training: It will be important that this training program has security and will not change if there are changes within the government. This could be accomplished by legislating the training and/or establishing formal partnerships with the University of Alberta or other institutions.

Commitment to hiring Indigenous people: There needs to be a formal commitment established to ensure that qualified Indigenous professionals are being hired to deliver this training. There have been occasions in the past where initial training and responsibilities are assigned to Indigenous peoples, only to have it be re-assigned in later years to non-Indigenous people. The group felt that this needs to be addressed in the training policies to circumvent this from reoccurring and compromising the integrity of the training.

An advisory committee: This could be established with representatives from the GoA, Indigenous communities and organizations, and universities and colleges. They could oversee the process, provide consultation and guidance on next steps, do a network analysis on the training that is currently offered within the GoA, and work toward locating the gaps.

Legal implications: The GoA is implementing UN Declaration principles in accordance with provincial law, but is not implementing the articles of UN Declaration. The legal aspects of this training should be reviewed.

After-care: The GoA should also develop policies and procedures to provide employees with after-care if they require more support after the training. The after-care could be through employee assistance programming and the development of resources for employees to draw from. Another way could be to ask Elders to be available after the programming, in some cases. It will be important to attend to differences across staff, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff will have varying reactions to the content they are learning.