Office of the Commissioner of
INDIGENOUS
LANGUAGES

Existing Pathways to Indigenous Language Immersion Teacher Training

A Backgrounder

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Forging a Path

"*Our languages are alive with a spirit, like the rivers, the sun, the mountains*." – Belinda Daniels, 2021

Indigenous languages are strong and resilient. Despite colonial attempts to erode and suppress Indigenous ways of knowing and being, communities in Canada and around the globe are reclaiming their inherent rights to teach, learn, speak, share, and celebrate their languages.

Immersion education is a cornerstone of this movement. By fostering opportunities for Indigenous people of all ages to acquire knowledge through the lens of their ancestral languages, **immersion education creates new language speakers** who have confidence and pride in their cultures, and the ability to carry forward the traditional knowledge embodied in their languages.

Despite a consensus that immersion education is the most effective strategy for language learning, there remains a shortage of Indigenous language immersion programs across Canada, and the primary barrier is a shortage of teachers. There is a **strong and urgent need to train, develop, and accredit Indigenous language immersion teachers**.

Immersion teachers need a wide range of specialized knowledge and skills, rooted in Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. Postsecondary institutions can be allies to this critical work by **cultivating partnerships** with Indigenous communities to provide infrastructure and support for community-led teacher training programs that center Indigenous Knowledges.

This handbook outlines a pathway to support the development of accredited immersion teacher education programs.

Historically, schools and universities have been sites of oppression for Indigenous Peoples. Thanks to the trailblazing advocacy and leadership of grassroots educators, Indigenous learners are reclaiming these spaces to achieve educational and professional goals. This is a fundamental aspect of Indigenous self-determination.

However, there remains work to be done for Indigenous ways of knowing to be fully recognized and valued within Western academic systems. Indigenous people and communities are best positioned to lead this work, and postsecondary institutions can respond to community needs by listening and adapting.

Guiding Principles

Immersion education programs are "…transforming hegemonic expectations about Indigenous languages and cultures, from loss and extinction to ***resilience and self-empowerment****."* – Sheilah Nicholas with Teresa McCarty, 2014

This handbook is anchored in the following guiding principles:

- Every Indigenous language holds immeasurable value in embodying the diverse identities, histories, worldviews, territories of Indigenous people and communities.

- Colonial attempts to suppress and silence Indigenous voices will not succeed. Indigenous languages across Canada are at different states of vitality – but all require dedicated resources and support to thrive once again.

- Immersion education is a key element of Indigenous language revitalization. Developing pathways to train and accredit immersion teachers will empower communities to explore and embrace their own unique immersion strategies.

- Indigenous language teachers need ongoing opportunities to develop and assess higher levels of proficiency in their languages.

- Indigenous people and communities know best what is needed to reclaim, revitalize, and strengthen their languages.

- Postsecondary institutions can uphold Indigenous rights to language, education, and self-determination by providing educational infrastructure, leadership, and support to community-rooted accreditation programs.

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This resource includes words of wisdom from Indigenous experts. These quotes are drawn primarily from published literature. A list of references cross-referenced by quote is included at the end of this handbook. Additional resources, including the research upon which this handbook is based, are also referenced at the end of the resource.

Defining Immersion Education

*"The only way to save a language is to **teach it to a child.** We don't know the words that they will invent. We don't know the language of children. But we do know the language rules, the language standards, and the old **language philosophies**. We have to be very strict in teaching those things so that the children can be **inventive in the traditional way**."* – Daryl Kipp, 2000

Language immersion refers to people learning *in* a language, rather than learning *about* a language. Language immersion can be an effective strategy for learners of all ages to gain proficiency in their languages, and different types of programs are used at different ages, including:

- **Language nests**: Home-like childcare programs for preschool-aged children
- **Immersion schools**: K-12 school programs in which children are educated in academic subjects such as math, science, and art through the medium of a new language
- **Language houses**: Community settings in which adults commit to living together in the language for a short period of time
- **Mentor-apprentice programs**: Flexible programs in which a learner and a proficient speaker spend time together completing activities and daily tasks in the language
- **Postsecondary immersion**: University or college proficiency programs that are taught through the medium of the language

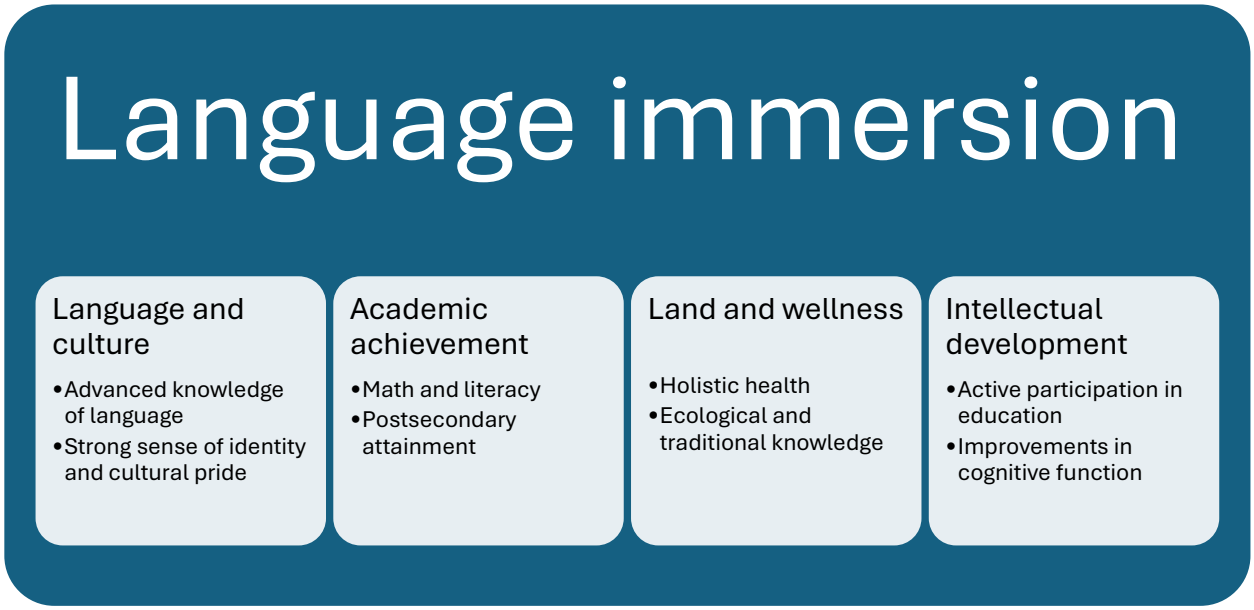
This resource focuses on developing capacity for immersion education across these and other domains. Sometimes immersion education is referred to as *language medium education* or *bilingual education,* and it is a **critical strategy for language revitalization**.

Children can acquire new languages readily, and schools are spaces that Indigenous communities can reclaim as safe and effective domains for their languages and cultures to thrive. Every child has the right to be educated in their language.

> *Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and **control their educational systems** and institutions providing **education in their own languages**, in a manner appropriate to their **cultural methods of teaching and learning**.*
>
> – United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 14.1

Why Immersion Matters

"*As Native peoples continue to define and **redefine education systems**, the role and place of language immersion education will become increasingly important. A generation of **children who are empowered** with their culture, language, sense of identity, and belief in their place in the world speaks to a **future led by strong leaders**.*" – Brian McInnes, 2013



Immersion education can complement other community-based initiatives and is an **important strategy for creating new speakers** of Indigenous languages. Preschool and school-aged children can achieve high levels of language proficiency for understanding and producing oral and written language. Young learners need adults with advanced language skills to teach them in immersion settings. Thus, immersion education at all ages and stages is an important strategy.

There are **numerous other benefits** to Indigenous immersion education. Children in Indigenous language immersion education have a strong sense of identity and cultural pride, and they see themselves as active participants in their educational journeys. They outperform their peers in mainstream programs on standardized tests of math and literacy, and over 90% go on to postsecondary education. Immersion graduates are multilingual, and benefit from improved cognitive function and decreased risk for diseases like dementia.

Indigenous immersion programs do not only benefit students; there are **positive ripple effects** throughout society. Families and communities of immersion students may be inspired to take up their own language journey, and many immersion graduates going on to lead language and culture initiatives in their communities. Indigenous languages are known to have positive and lasting impacts on community health, and they hold key important that can support climate change solutions.

A Critical Need

"*The need for **effective teacher training** still remains a key issue in achieving a successful level of operation for language immersion classes*." – Stephen Neyooxet Greymorning, 1997

Language revitalization is complex and multi-layered, requiring programs and resources for all ages and across domains of home, school, work, and community. **Interweaving immersion throughout** is an effective strategy to create new speakers.

However, a **shortage of trained and certified teachers** is preventing immersion education from being implemented where it is critically needed, which significantly hinders language revitalization efforts. The shortage of teachers is due to a **lack of training opportunities**.

There are over 100 Indigenous language programs offered at nearly 50 postsecondary institutions across Canada, but most do not cumulate in a degree or lead to teacher certification. Meanwhile, mainstream teacher training programs fail to **center Indigenous knowledges** and thereby fail to address the cultural needs of Indigenous language education.

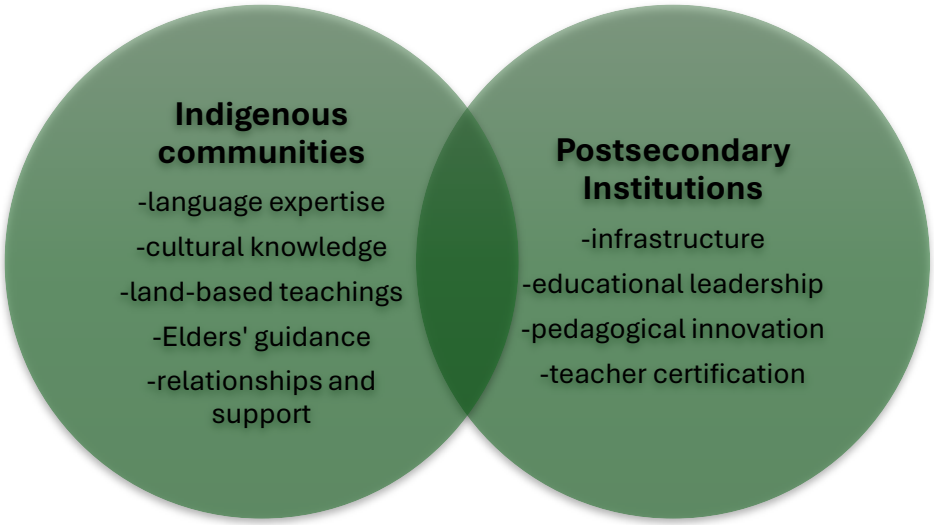
In some regions, makeshift solutions have been implemented to grant speakers temporary or partial certification to teach their Indigenous languages in schools. These emergency measures acknowledge the **urgency of transmitting vulnerable Indigenous language knowledge** to younger generations before it's too late. However, this is merely a stopgap rather than a long-term solution.

Dedicated Indigenous language immersion teacher training programs will pave the way for future educators to acquire the important skills to nurture new generations of speakers through teachings that are land-based, culturally grounded, and community-rooted.

The Power of Partnerships

"*Don't let other people define your needs, how you do things. …Your language will show you the way*." – Daryl Kipp, 2000

Finding allies in universities and other postsecondary institutions can be a bold step for communities to **navigate educational systems** and **fast-track immersion teacher training and accreditation**. However, universities have not always been safe or welcoming spaces for Indigenous students. **Indigenous leadership** is a fundamental requirement in designing and implementing immersion teacher training programs. The best way to ensure that Indigenous leaders have decision-making capacities is for postsecondary institutions to partner with communities.



When education programs are **community-designed and led**, Indigenous students' cultural needs can be nourished, and they may have opportunities to **live and study in their home communities.** Indigenous ways of knowing and being can be guiding factors in the development and implementation of the curriculum, and the diverse ideologies and belief systems of Indigenous communities can be respected and upheld.

Postsecondary institutions can ensure that programs adequately prepare graduates for teaching careers by structuring programs to meet regional standards for teacher certification. They can provide expertise in pedagogical theories and instructional design, as well as infrastructure to support diverse learners' needs. However, institutions must also be flexible in allowing communities to customize programming to their own unique cultural and linguistic contexts.

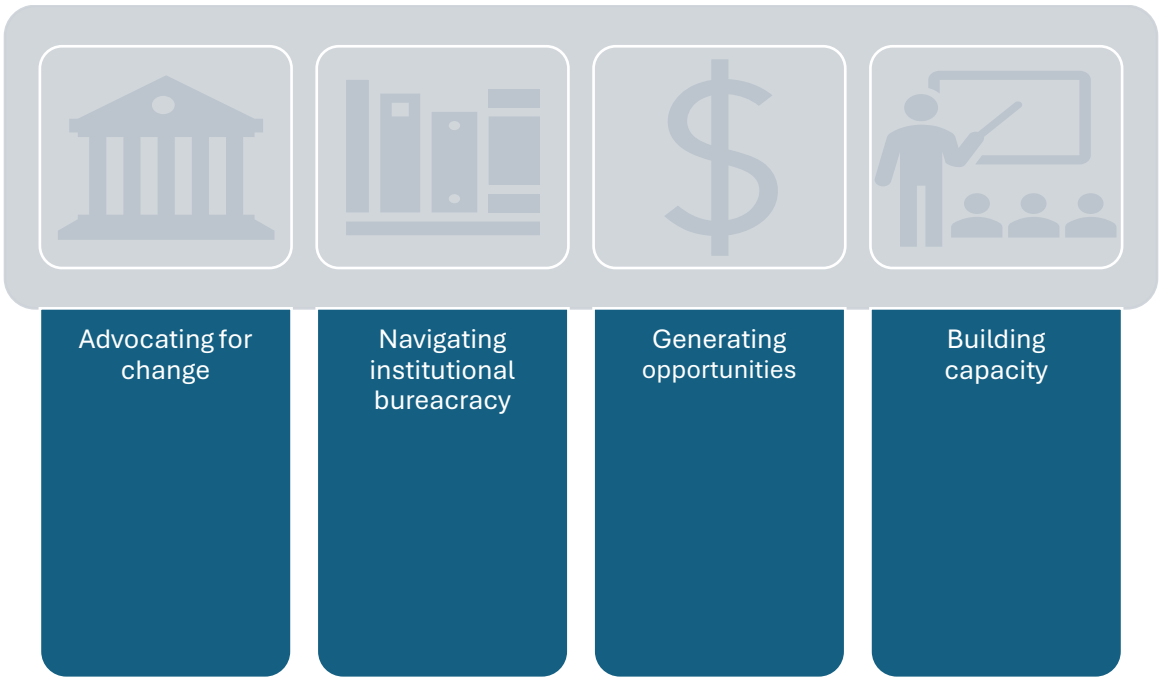
By supporting communities to make their own decisions about educational programming, **postsecondary institutions can be true allies** in the fight for Indigenous rights to self-determination in education.

Breaking Down Barriers

"Applying an Indigenous perspective to ***re-conceptualize schools as sacred landscapes*** *is an appropriate assertion of Indigenous knowledge and ways of being to frame self determined educational initiatives … through a relevant* ***curriculum of survivance***." - Makalapua Alencastre, 2015

The damaging impacts of colonial policies and practices in what is today is known as Canada are far-reaching. Breaking down the systemic barriers that have prevented Indigenous people from realizing their rights to language and education remains an ongoing challenge.

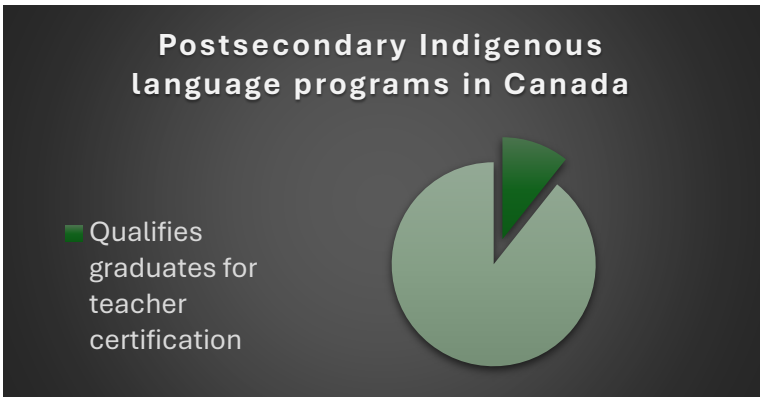
Government legislation and regulations; institutionalized racism and organizational bureaucracy; sustainable funding; staffing and recruitment: these are some of the major barriers that communities and their allies must face in developing immersion education programs. However, as outlined in the pages that follow, these challenges can be overcome.



Advocating for Change

"*In order for us to **reverse over a century of oppressive practices** on First Nations, we need multi-layered strategies in all areas of life, including in what language, and whose knowledge we choose to educate our children.*" – Kathryn Michel, 2012

One of the pressing policy issues for Indigenous language education is **teacher certification**. There are over 100 Indigenous language programs offered through postsecondary institutions in Canada, but only a small number of of these qualify graduates for teacher certification.



Teacher certification policies vary across provinces and territories. Some regions have implemented stopgap measures to allow Indigenous language speakers to teach in K-12 schools without the canonical qualifications. Others only allow Indigenous language speakers to serve in supporting roles to certified teachers, even when they are the lead experts with intimate knowledge of Indigenous languages and extensive teaching experience. In both scenarios, **Indigenous language teachers are under-resourced and underpaid.**

Regional teacher certification bodies need to recognize and value Indigenous language knowledge and work alongside Indigenous communities to design accreditation pathways for Indigenous immersion teachers.

University nuhelot'įne thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills is jointly owned and operated by seven First Nations in Alberta. The university has a celebrated history of supporting Cree and Dene learners to develop their language proficiency through certificate, diploma, and degree programs. Beginning in 2025, University nuhelot'įne thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills will also be offering a **Cree immersion teacher education program**. This 4-year Bachelor of Education program will prepare for the challenges and rewards of immersion education. Graduates will be trained as nêhiyaw okiskinohamâkêwak (Cree teachers) and **eligible for teacher certification** through Alberta Education.

Navigating Bureaucracy

"*Universities, especially, need to understand the colonial roles they have played in linguistic genocide, both in the past and in the present. And they need to understand the role that they can play in* ***turning this story around to assist Indigenous communities*** *to maintain or revitalise their languages*." – Andrea Bear Nicholas, 2009

There is a legacy of university researchers taking advantage of Indigenous people and communities, by extracting invaluable language and cultural data, by failing to gain consent for publishing privileged stories, and for numerous other injustices that **cannot be forgotten**. Universities have also been sites of oppression, where Indigenous people have not always welcomed or included in decisions about their own educational opportunities.

For community-postsecondary partnerships to thrive, institutions must **acknowledge these harms** and work to move through them in a way that empowers Indigenous knowledge systems and teaching methods. Indigenous leaders seeking partnerships with postsecondary institutions must insist that bureaucratic systems be malleable to adapt to Indigenous communities' needs.

The community-based non-profit organization **Tsi Tyónnheht Onkwawén:na** was established in 2000 with a mandate of supporting the revitalization of Kanyen'kéha (the Mohawk language) in Tyendinaga.

Over the past 25 years, the organization has collaborated with various postsecondary institutions, and they understand firsthand the **power imbalances** that can exist when partnerships are not community-led.

Their current partnership with Queen's University was developed over the course of a decade, with both parties working to establish commitments, communication, and trust. The partnership led to an accredited **Kanyen'kéha Language and Culture Certificate Program** for adult learners.

All aspects of the program are led by Tsi Tyónnheht Onkwawén:na, from recruitment and admissions, to staffing, to curriculum design and delivery. Not only is the program taught in community, but students and instructors **liaise with community-based administrators** for tasks like enrolment, accommodations, and graduation. This avoids the burden of navigating university systems and structures.

Establishing a **community outpost** for students has effectively broken down institutional barriers that many Indigenous students experience in postsecondary settings. By giving administrative and decision-making control to Tsi Tyónnheht Onkwawén:na, Queen's University is supporting **Indigenous self-determination in higher education**.

Generating Opportunities

"*Indigenous language medium/immersion education needs* ***supportive legislation, policy, and funding*** *that is long-range and even* ***multigenerational in perspective***."- William "Pila" Wilson, Ryan DeCaire, Brooke Niiyogaabawiikwe Gonzalez & Teresa L. McCarty, 2022

Funding is often cited as a challenge for developing and sustaining postsecondary Indigenous language programs. However, funding alone is not enough to solve the problem. It needs to come with **systemic change** in government and institutional structures to be effective. Universities and other colonial institutions have a responsibility to support Indigenous language revitalization, as part of a larger effort to redress past wrongs.

> *We call upon post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages.*
>
> - Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #16

Partnering with communities allows postsecondary institutions to explore **alternative funding models** that are more sustainable for small community-based cohorts.

For example, universities may enter into agreements with partnering communities that provide programming on a **per-course funding basis**, as opposed to following a tuition-based model that is tied to enrolments. These agreements can be customized based on community's needs and capacities. Some communities may hire instructors directly or they may have classroom space in community that does not rely on institutional infrastructure.

Communities may also secure their own funding from government agencies, non-profit organizations, and other sources.

Importantly, although funding opportunities have expanded in recent years, there remains a strong need to **coordinate funding** to ensure continuity of programming.

Throughout the past decade, the number of new learners and speakers of **Sḵwx̱wú7mesh sníchim** has grown exponentially. This is in large part due to a laddered sequence of immersion education programs offered in partnership with Simon Fraser University.

A Squamish-led non-profit organized **fundraising initiatives** to support the first cohorts of learners. Since then, the Nation and the university have been proactive in coordinating funds from various sources to ensure **momentum continues** for new generations of speakers.

Governments and other institutions have a responsibility to provide **long-term and sustainable investments** in Indigenous language immersion education.

Developing Capacity

"*It is vital that mainstream post-secondary institutions recognize that, in order to work earnestly and authentically for improvements in Indigenous education, [they] hire* ***more Indigenous staff and faculty*** *and expand currently existing Indigenous programs. Furthermore, the* ***capacity and expertise*** *that exists within Indigenous communities must be formally recognized*." - Lindsay Morcom and colleagues, 2017

Teachers themselves need teachers to help them acquire the wide range of specialized skills needed for immersion education. The best people to provide this training are the Knowledge Keepers who understand how Indigenous languages and cultures should be taught and transmitted.

When Indigenous communities have **true and trusted partnerships** with postsecondary institutions, they can hold decision-making authority to determine who is hired to instruct teachers-in-training. Universities can be good allies by **acknowledging lived experience** and cultural and linguistic expertise as credentials for community-based instructors.

Instructors need **training resources** and other supports to navigate the complexities and bureaucracies of teaching in postsecondary institutions. They also need **mentorship and guidance** from university faculty and staff. Institutions must adapt to recognize and value this work.

In addition to recognizing community-determined credentials in hiring instructors, universities need to empower capacity development by collaborating to create new pathways for PhDs.

Did you know?

There are only **eight graduate degree programs** specializing in Indigenous languages in Canada, including three PhD programs.

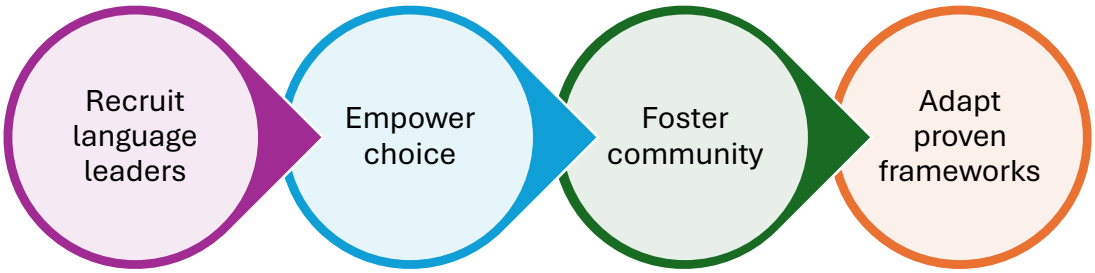
There is a strong and urgent need for more graduate-level training opportunities in Indigenous languages. This is especially true for language education, so that Indigenous faculty can lead the training and mentorship for future generations of immersion teachers.

Pathways to Immersion Teacher Training

"*I truly believe the fire is within all of us.* ***We all learn in our own way****; we just have to find which way is our way to learn*." – SX̱EDŦELISIYE Renee Sampson, 2014

Walking on two legs means finding a strong footing in both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. It means forging a path that balances the best of both ways of being, rather than simply integrating Indigenous Knowledge into existing systems. This will differ from person to person and community to community, and it is important to recognize that the most promising practices can be adapted (not adopted) for different contexts.

There is no one path. However, there are shared routes along the way to immersion teacher training, and the pages that follow outline strategies that can be adapted for many.



Recruit Future Language Leaders

*"We know the **power of education**, its power to destroy and its power to heal and thrive. We are still here because we continue to practice our powerful traditional forms of learning and teaching to be a good contributing member of community."* - Lorna Wanosts'a7 Williams, 2023

Even when programs are offered in partnership, **building momentum takes time and creativity**. Students may have concerns about their future job prospects in Indigenous language immersion, and they may sense pressure from their family or community to follow a more mainstream educational route. **These feelings are legitimate**, and they are often rooted in fear from generations of colonial oppression.

Breaking this hegemonic cycle requires a **holistic approach**, in which teacher training and immersion education are embedded in a broader community-driven plan to rejuvenate language and culture. Encouraging youth to **imagine their potential** to shape their community's future through language is an important first step.

Indigenous language immersion education is a **viable career pathway** that can lead to **transformative change** for educators, students, families, and communities more broadly. Immersion education is an integral step in the pathway to Indigenous self-determination.

Immersion education is thought to be the **primary catalyst** for the **revival of the Hawaiian language**. When the programs began in the early 1980s, there were under 50 Hawaiian-speaking children, and today there are **over 3000 students** in Hawaiian immersion education.

Hawaiian learners can begin their language education journey in preschool, in the Pūnana Leo (language nest), and they have options to continue through to a PhD – all through the medium of the Hawaiian language.

These educational pathways exist because a small grassroots group of teachers in the 1980s had the **courage to envision** in future in which the Hawaiian language was once again thriving – in homes, schools, and beyond.

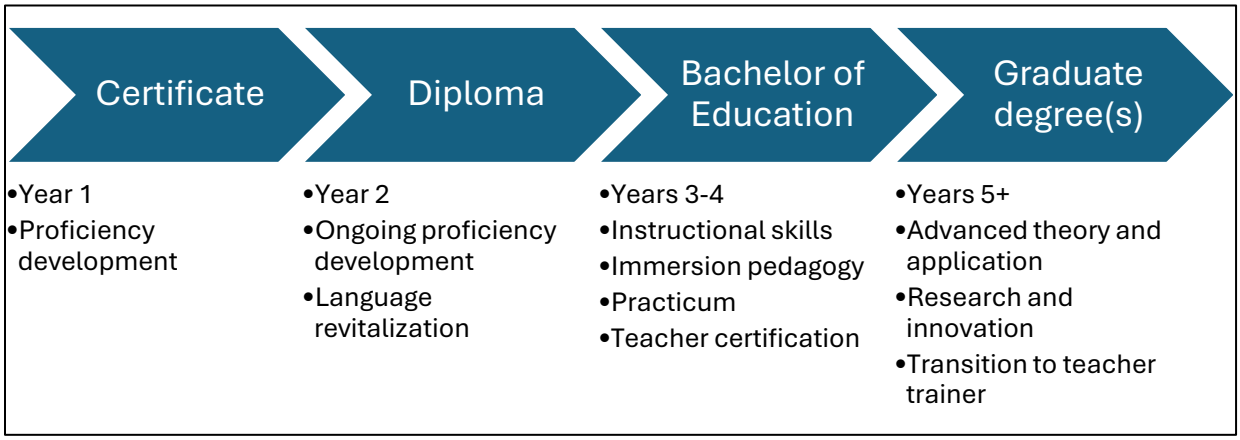
Empower Choice

"*The laddered nature of the programmes provides opportunities for community members to partake in the parts of them that* ***relate directly to their goals*** *and academic levels*." – Onowa McIvor and colleagues, 2017

Postsecondary students in Indigenous language education have diverse starting points and end goals. There is no single pathway that works for everyone.

Especially given the breadth of skills and knowledges needed to be an immersion teacher, students may have **different backgrounds and interests** in language proficiency, educational practice, theories of language acquisition, and broader contexts around language and cultural revitalization.

Universities can respond to the diverse needs of Indigenous students by structuring programs so that education pathways can be fast-tracked where one credential ladders into another. This not only sets the stage for a robust Indigenous immersion workforce, but it also **empowers students to design and choose** the pathway that best meets their unique needs.



Laddered programs support students who are on the pathway to becoming immersion teachers, as well as those who are destined for other important roles in language and cultural revitalization. Each step in the ladder is an opportunity to recognize and respect Indigenous Peoples' inherent rights to education and language. Building **flexibility and choice** into Indigenous language programs through laddered structures is one of the ways in which universities can be good allies to Indigenous communities.

Foster Community

"*The course content was beneficial but what was really amazing was* ***networking with other Indigenous communities***." – SX̱EDŦELISIYE Renee Sampson on the University of Victoria Master's of Indigenous Language Revitalization Program, 2014

A major component of professional development for Indigenous immersion teachers is networking. Teachers need to **share ideas, best practices, and solutions** to common challenges. No matter how comprehensive an initial teacher education program might be, teachers need ongoing opportunities to **connect with and learn from other educators**. Particularly for language immersion teachers, they also need dedicated **mentorship opportunities** to advance language proficiency.

Professional learning networks and in-service training workshops are mainstays of the French immersion teacher network– but Indigenous language teachers often feel isolated, with fewer opportunities to connect and share.

Creating community amongst Indigenous immersion teachers is an important step in the path towards developing and sustaining Indigenous language immersion across the country.

The Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (or **CILLDI**) has been bringing together Indigenous language teachers, learners, Elders, and advocates for over 25 years.

Each year, over 100 people come together for CILLDI's summer school, which features over a dozen courses on various topics including language teaching and learning, documentation, revitalization, and linguistics.

Beyond providing training, CILLDI has built a community of language warriors from across Canada. A highlight for participants is the annual banquet, where students celebrate their achievements and share cultural connections through language.

A strong testament to CILLDI's success is that many students return to CILLDI for multiple summers of learning and collaborating. Some even graduate from being students to instructors in the program.

CILLDI's grassroots network brings people together around language, sustaining relationships that foster innovation in immersion and beyond.

Adapt Proven Frameworks

"*Although they differ in specifics from one people to another, traditional Aboriginal teachings have described a* ***coherent, interconnected world***." – Norine Buffalo, 2021

There are over 80 unique Indigenous languages spoken across Canada, each representing diverse knowledge systems, cultural values, connections to land, and ways of being. For Indigenous immersion education to succeed, it needs to **uphold and respect the teachings** inherent to each community's language and culture.

This **diversity** may seem daunting to outside educators and administrators when they try to envision how best to support Indigenous communities in their pathways to postsecondary immersion teacher training. Historically and still today, systemic racism has created institutional barriers that block Indigenous language immersion teachers from accessing the training, resources, and supports they need.

A tangible solution is to design **curriculum frameworks** with course shells, or templates, which can be **adapted to each communities' needs**. Universities can be good allies by ensuring that programs are structured to meet regional standards for teacher certification while still allowing customization by community partners. This affords community-based instructors the flexibility to design programs that appropriately transmit the knowledge contained within their languages.

The **University of Victoria** is a global leader in postsecondary programming for Indigenous language revitalization. Their five programs have been developed over the past two decades through **collaboration and partnership** with Indigenous communities across Canada.

For community-led programs to function successfully within the confines of a university, a **careful balance** must be struck between bureaucratic requirements and community needs. Rather than imposing an institutional policy, the University of Victoria is giving community partners the tools they need to navigate postsecondary systems.

Part of this includes **curriculum frameworks** with sequences of course shells that can be adapted to individual community needs. These customizable course shells include templates for lesson plans, classroom activities, assessment tools that are structured to be adapted for different communities, languages, and cohorts of learners.

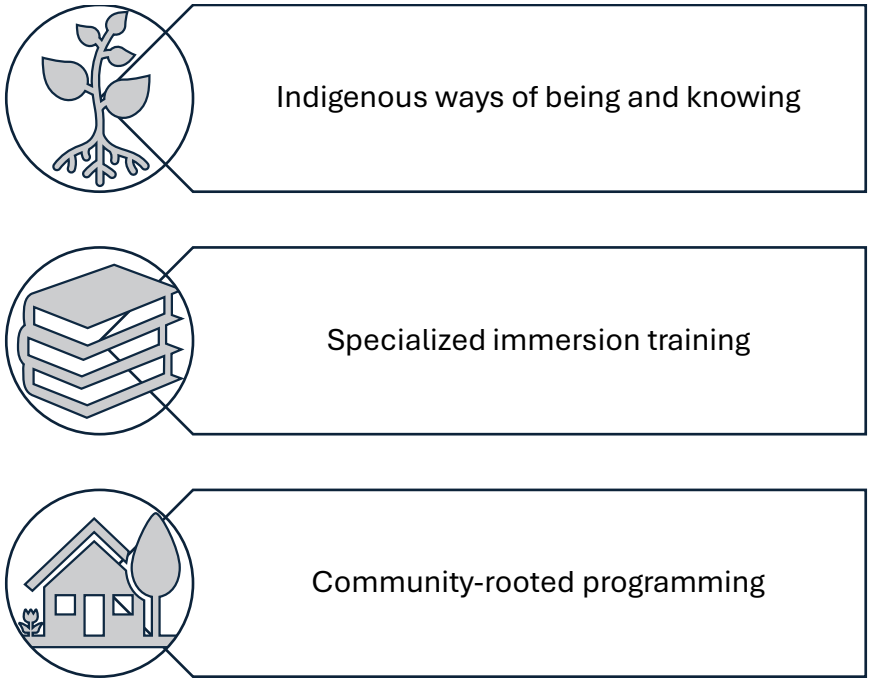
In responding to community needs and interests, the University of Victoria is helping to **shift power relations** within the postsecondary landscape.

Key Ingredients of Immersion Teacher Education

"*Language immersion teaching demands a high level of **physical stamina**, knowledge of the **tribal language and culture** and the capacity to **help advance students** to meet educational objectives*."
- Janine Pease-Pretty On Top, 2004

Indigenous language immersion teachers require a wide range of specialized skills. They need advanced proficiency in their languages, specialized training in immersion pedagogy, expertise in second language acquisition and bilingualism, practical experience in classroom management, instructional strategies for immersion, curriculum and resource development, and Indigenous-based assessment. They need to work within a standardized curriculum but adapt - not adopt - it to meet the children's and community's unique cultural needs.

Teacher training programs need to find a balance between the following objectives:



Indigenous Ways of Being and Knowing

"*It is … essential that **healing** be a component of language learning programs for First Nations people. Healing is initiated in a couple ways: one, the **inclusion of ceremony and cultural protocols** in language programming; secondly, encouraging and building an understanding of wahkohtowin, which is **relationship and relatedness**.*" – Kevin Lewis, Marilyn Shirt and Jesse Sylvestre, 2017

Institutions must look to the guidance of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and other leaders and experts within communities to understand and implement **culturally responsive pedagogies**. Indigenous Peoples and communities across Canada are diverse, with unique and varied cultural protocols and practices. There is no single way to **respect and uphold Indigenous values** in postsecondary programs, and cultural teachings need to be foundational and infused throughout a program, rather than treated as something supplementary.

The University of New Brunswick's **Wabanaki Bachelor of Education** prepares graduates to teach in Wabanaki communities through a culturally grounded curriculum focused on Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey language learning and Wabanaki ways of knowing and being.

The curriculum was created in 2019 by Elders and Knowledge Keepers and aims to provide students with a firm grounding in Wabanaki perspectives on language, land, and history. It incorporates teachings from the five nations of the Wabanaki Confederacy: the Wolastoqey, Passamaquoddy, Mi'kmaq, Abenaki, and Penobscot First Nations.

Demand for the program is growing, with most graduates choosing to teach in their home communities following graduation. It is now offered as an online program, allowing students to balance childcare and other family needs with their schooling.

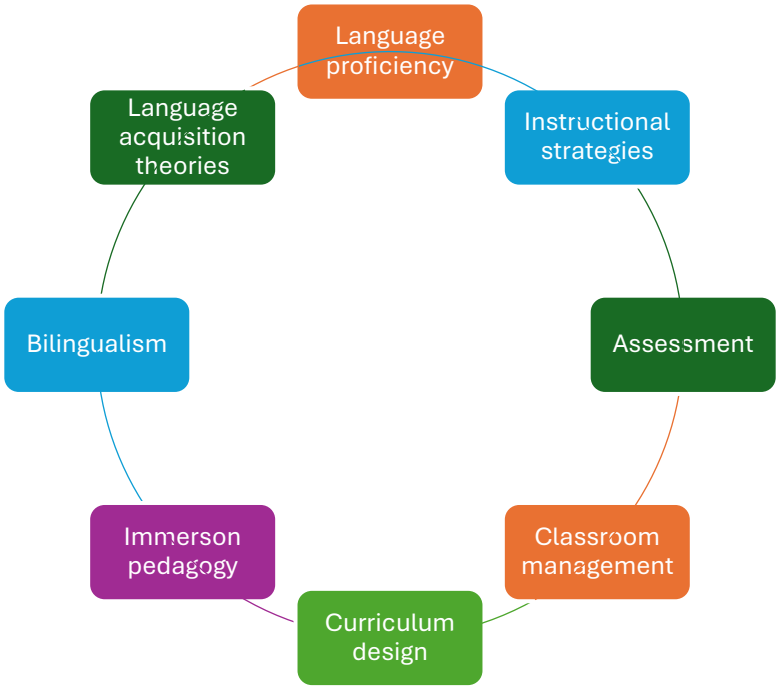
Elders remain an integral part of the program, by leading and participating in classroom activities. Land-based learning is still prioritized in the curriculum, despite its online delivery. Language courses focus not only on building proficiency but giving students the skills to teach the language to younger generations. Traditional teachings rooted in Wabanaki values remain core to the program.

The Wabanaki Bachelor of Education serves as a **model of how Indigenous values, protocols, and practices can be upheld and respected in a postsecondary institutional setting**.

Specialized Immersion Training

"*Preparing teachers as cultural and educational practitioners requires abilities from a **new skill set** aligned with, yet different from, mainstream practices. (They) constitute a **rigorous program** that contributes to the preparation of teachers as culture-based educators-teachers and nation-builders*." – Kalena Silva, Makalapua Alencastre, Keiki Kawai'ae'a, and Alohalani Housman, 2008

Indigenous immersion teachers in Canada have been trailblazers – acquiring the knowledge and skills they need often without the benefit of specialized training programs. The time is here to create new programs to support future generations of teachers and learners.



Training for immersion is multi-faceted. Immersion teachers need **advanced proficiency** in their languages so they can remain in immersion throughout the school day and talk about diverse topics in areas such as math, science, social studies, outdoor education, and so on. They also need the basic skill sets required of any teacher, including **instructional strategies, classroom management**, and **assessment**.

Because Indigenous language education is typically under-resourced, immersion teachers also need to be capable of designing **curricula** and creating **classroom materials**. Moreover, given the special circumstances around children learning through a new language, immersion teachers need to be educated in **immersion pedagogy**, bilingualism, and theories of language acquisition.

Community-Rooted Programming

*"(Hybrid) course delivery allows students to enrol on a part-time basis in coursework while they continue to **live and work in their local communities**, which is key to their completion and overall success*." – Velma Hale with Louise Lockard, 2018

Language comes from the land, and learning language from the land is an important aspect of proficiency development. Moreover, Indigenous students need to care for children, Elders, and other kin while completing their studies. Supporting Indigenous students' rights to higher education means providing postsecondary opportunities that allow students to study from their home communities. Many universities across Canada are innovating program delivery models that incorporate virtual classrooms, satellite campuses, and blended learning to better support student needs.

Simon Fraser University's **Indigenous Language Program** began in 1989 with 49 students enrolled in four courses. It originated in response to a community initiative to reclaim control over education and training of Secwepemc people. Today, the program has grown from four courses to five accreditations – a certificate, diploma, Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, and PhD, all focused on Indigenous languages. The program has supported 22 languages from 15 communities and has up to 1,700 students enrolled each semester.

One of the key ingredients supporting this program's success is that courses are offered in community through partnerships with Indigenous community organizations. Students live and work in their home communities, connecting with the institution and each other virtually or through hybrid arrangements.

Simon Fraser University's flexibility and responsiveness has paved the way for Indigenous students to succeed in gaining proficiency, linguistic expertise, and educational skills in their languages.

Since Time Immemorial

"*Indigenous immersion efforts have **always existed in the hearts and minds** of survivors and in the efforts of native people to use their first language*." – Mary Hermes & Keiki Kawai'ae'a, 2014

Throughout history, Indigenous Peoples have communicated across Nations, sharing territories, resources, and knowledge. Immersion was a natural way to learn, and multilingualism was the norm. Colonization disrupted this, but it is time for Indigenous communities to **reclaim immersion** as a learning pathway.

The **far-reaching benefits of immersion education** are widely known, but a lack of dedicated teacher training programs means there is a shortage of trained and certified Indigenous language immersion teachers. This is an urgent need that will have **ripple effects** across all domains of language strengthening efforts.

This handbook has outlined **concrete steps** that can be taken now to develop new programs and bring immersion education to their communities. These are summarized below:

Partner with postsecondary institutions that respect Indigenous leadership.

- Establish strong partnerships through mutual commitments, communication, and trust
- Protect Indigenous rights to self-determination through community-led partnerships

Address systemic barriers that have Indigenous rights to education.

- Advocate for equitable and sustainable certification pathways for Indigenous language teachers
- Innovate community-based strategies to help students navigate institutional bureaucracy
- Coordinate government, institutional, non-profit, and community funding sources
- Develop capacity in higher education by supporting Indigenous students to pursue graduate degrees

Follow proven strategies in program development .

- Disrupt the hegemonic cycle by empowering youth to take active roles in language revitalization
- Develop laddered programs that meet the diverse needs and career goals of students
- Create space for Indigenous language educators to network and learn from each other
- Share resources and best practices with other communities by creating customizable course shells

Create curriculum with key ingredients for successful outcomes.

- Prioritize Indigenous ways of being and knowing
- Integrate specialized training in immersion pedagogy
- Offer students opportunities to study on their home territories, with kin and community nearby

As we walk this path, we can look to a future that **restores the natural balance** that comes from Indigenous language immersion.

A Lifelong Learning Journey

"*The fight for Indigenous language survival is ongoing and exists in a multitude of sites worldwide … Language can be relegated to history or be seen as* ***our present and our future***." – Kathryn Michel, 2012

This handbook provides an introductory overview of the needs, challenges, and pathways surrounding Indigenous language immersion teacher training programs. For a more in-depth discussion, please refer the **research report** upon which this handbook is based.

- *Towards a Roadmap for Indigenous Language Immersion Teacher Training*

We raise our hands in respect and gratitude to the many Knowledge Keepers and other experts who have advanced Indigenous language immersion in Canada and around the world. Other resources to support your learning journey include the following:

- A Guide to Language Revitalization: Promising Practices for Consideration by First Nations Schools, First Nations Schools Association (2023)
- Language Immersion Fact Sheet, First Peoples' Cultural Council (2018)
- Investing in Native Language Immersion: A Summary for Native Communities and Language Practitioners, First Nations Development Institute (2021)
- Stories of Indigenous Education (search for "immersion" or filter by "teacher training"), National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Education
- Teaching Resource Centre, National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Education
- Towards_Indigenous_Language_Revitalization: An_Informative_Resource, Supporting Indigenous Language Revitalization (2024)
- Immersion Education Resources, Midwest Indigenous Immersion Network

Words of Wisdom

Quotes from Indigenous experts are drawn from the following sources:

Alencastre, Makalapua. 2015. *E Ho'oulu 'ia Na Kumu Mauli Ola Hawai'i: Preparing Hawaiian Cultural Identity Teachers*. University of Hawai'i, EdD dissertation.

- *Breaking Down Barriers*

Bear Nicholas, Andrea. 2009. "Reversing Language Shift through a Native Language Immersion Teacher Training Program in Canada." *Social Justice through Multilingual Education*, edited by Ajit Mohanty et al., Multilingual Matters, pp. 220–237.

- *Navigating Bureaucracy*

Blair, Heather, Belinda **Daniels**, Norine **Buffalo**, and Velvalee Georges. 2021. "At the Convergence of Theory and Practice: Nourishing the Learning Spirits of Indigenous Language Teachers in Schools." *Sustaining Indigenous Languages: Connecting Communities, Teachers, and Scholars*, edited by Lisa Crowshoe et al., Northern Arizona University, pp. 63–79.

- *Forging a Path* (Belinda Daniels)
- *Adapt Proven Frameworks* (Norine Buffalo)

Czaykowska-Higgins, Ewa, Strang Burton, Onowa **McIvor**, and Aliki Marinakis. 2017. "Supporting Indigenous Language Revitalisation through Collaborative Post-Secondary Proficiency-Building Curriculum." *Language Documentation and Description*, edited by Wesley Y. Leonard and Haley De Korne, vol. 14, EL Publishing, pp. 136–159.

- *Empower Choice*

Greymorning, Stephen. "*Going beyond Words: The Arapaho Immersion Program*." 1997. ERIC (ED415061)

- *Addressing a Critical Need*

Hermes, Mary, and Keiki **Kawai'ae'a**. 2014. "Revitalizing Indigenous Languages through Indigenous Immersion Education." *Language Immersion Education*, vol. 2 (2): pp. 303–322, https://doi.org/10.1075/jicb.2.2.10her.

- *Since Time Immemorial*

Kipp, Darrell R. 2000. *Encouragement, Guidance, Insights and Lessons Learned for Native Language Activists Developing Their Own Tribal Language Programs*, Piegan Institute.

- *Defining Immersion Education*
- *The Power of Partnerships*

Lewis, Kevin, Marilyn **Shirt**, and Jesse **Sylvestre**. 2017. "Looking at the Evolution of University of Nuhelot'Ine Thaiyots'i Nistamêyimâkanak Blue Quills Language programmes." *Promising Practices in Indigenous Teacher Education*, pp. 237–248, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-6400-5_17.

- *Indigenous Ways of Being and Knowing*

Lockard, Louise, and Velma **Hale**. 2018. "The Diné Dual Language Professional Development Project." *Promising Practices in Indigenous Teacher Education*, edited by Paul Whitinui et al., Springer, pp. 163–174.

- *Community-Rooted Programming*

McCarty, Teresa L., and Sheilah E. **Nicholas**. 2014. Reclaiming Indigenous languages: A Reconsideration of the Roles and Responsibilities of Schools." *Review of Research in Education* 38(1): 106–136, https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x13507894.

- *Guiding Principles*

McInnes, Brian D. 2013. "Saving Culture Through Language: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Ojibwe Language Immersion Educator Experience." *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics*: https://doi.org/10.55016/ojs/jah.v2013y2013.53225.

- *Why Immersion Matters*

Michel, Kathryn A. 2012. *Trickster's Path to Language Transformation: Stories of Secwepemc Immersion from Chief Atahm School*. University of British Columbia, EdD dissertation.

- *Advocating for Change*
- *A Lifelong Learning Journey*

Morcom, Lindsay, Kate Freeman, Jennifer Davis. 2017. "Rising Like the Thunderbird: The Reclamation of Indigenous Teacher Education." *The Curriculum History of Canadian Teacher Education*, Routledge, pp. 23–40.

- *Developing Capacity*

Pease-Pretty on Top, Janine. 2004. *Native American Language Immersion: Innovative Native Education for Children & Families*. American Indian College Fund.

- *Key Ingredients of Immersion Teacher Education*

Sampson, Renee. 2014. *WIÁLḴEN NE SḰÁL: SXEDŦELISIYE's SENĆOŦEN Auto-Ethnography*. University of Victoria, MEd project.

- *Pathways to Immersion Teacher Training*
- *Foster Community*

Silva, Kalena, Makalapua **Alencastre**, Keiki **Kawai'ae'a**, and Alohalani **Housman**. 2008. Generating a sustainable legacy: Teaching founded upon the Kumu Honua Mauli Ola. In Maenette K. P. Ah Nee-Benham (Ed.), *Indigenous Educational Models for Contemporary Practice: In Our Mother's Voice, II*, pp.29-40. New York: Taylor and Francis.

- *Specialized Immersion Training*

Williams, Lorna Wanosts'a7 and Budd Hall. 2023. Cwélelep: Dissonance and new learning at the University of Victoria. In Maringe, Felix (ed). Colonization and Epistemic Injustice in Higher Education: Precursors to Decolonization. London: Routledge, pp. 55-66.

- *Recruit Future Language Leaders*

Wilson, William H., Ryan **DeCaire**, Brooke Niiyogaabawiikwe **Gonzalez** & Teresa L. McCarty. 2022. "Progress, Challenges, and Trajectories for Indigenous Language Content-based Instruction in the United States and Canada." *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education*, vol. 10(2), pp. 343–373, https://doi.org/10.1075/jicb.21023.wil.

- *Generating Opportunities*

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