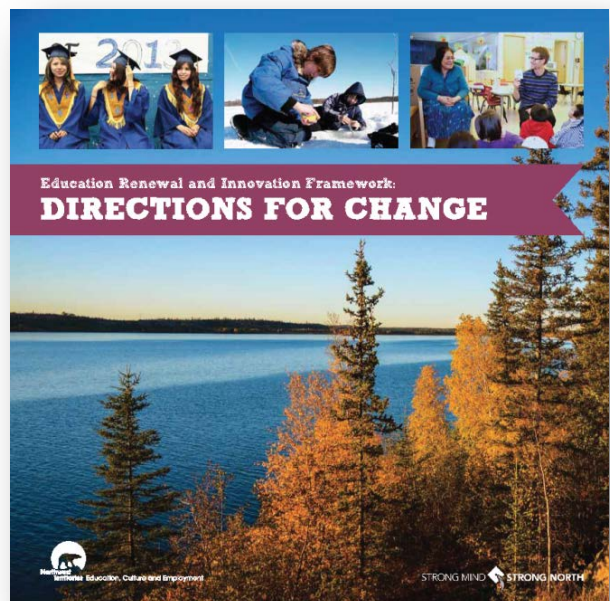

Education Renewal & Innovation Support Documents

*Support Letters and Quotes
about the ERI Framework:
Directions for Change and the
Education Renewal Process*



Quotes on *Directions for Change*

“[The Framework] presents us with an inspiring ‘Vision for the Future’ that applies to all children in Canada. At the heart of this vision are nine fundamental commitments: everything from ensuring that schools and communities work together to making student wellness an absolute priority. *Directions for Change* will not only shape the future of the NWT but will, I hope, be read and embraced by the entire country.”



~ Dr. Stuart Shanker, Research Professor of Philosophy and Psychology with York University, Ontario

“I’ve just had a chance to look at the new NWT Framework and in short... Wow! Very impressive. You’ve done an incredible job, and these are the highlights for me: Beautiful format...; Strong on research – you’ve done your academic homework, and it shows; Cultural Inclusion and Voice – the intensive consultations you’ve undertaken are reflected in an incredibly strong community voice, which can only increase the chances of success for this new Framework; It’s based on history, and yet forward thinking...you’ve struck a good balance between what was, what is, and what ought to be...”

~ Linda Mlodzinski, Social Studies Consultant, Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment Branch, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning

“I like the forward-looking emphasis of the Northwest Territories Education Renewal Framework. It embraces the thinking that we need in the North to make education a family and community priority. It will be only through efforts - family by family, community by community - classroom by classroom - principal by principal - to break down community-school barriers and family-school barriers that we will we begin to see a shift in social norms toward improved attendance and better outcomes in school.”



~ Dr. Mary Simon, Chairperson, National Committee on Inuit Education



Dr. Allan Luke, Research Professor with Queensland University of Technology, Education Faculty, Australia



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CRICOS No. 00213J ABN 83 791 724 622

1 May 2014

Mr. John Stewart
Director - Renewal and Innovation Division
Department of Education, Culture and Employment
PO Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT
Canada

Dear Mr. Stewart

Thank you for the opportunity to read and comment on your current *Educational Renewal and Innovation Framework: Directions for Change*. As you know, I've just completed four years of work for the Australian federal government on the largest empirical study of Indigenous school reform in Australia, and we've been through several decades of attempts at curriculum reform in Queensland to address the needs of rural and remote schools with high percentages of Aboriginal students. So it is from the perspective of a senior empirical researcher and former Deputy Director General of Queensland schools that I offer response and feedback to your current efforts.

First – I offer my congratulations to the Department's and the government's overall approach. There is much compelling evidence now that the 'status quo' in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and school reform will not in itself begin to achieve the laudable goals of 'closing the gap' in attendance, achievement and overall school participation for Indigenous children and youth. Further, we have a decade of evidence from Australia but also from US and New Zealand systems that 'back to basics' approaches – no matter how appealing to many – simply do not begin to address the core issues that, I believe, your *Directions for Change* document addresses head on.

Second, what we also know is that a 'piecemeal' or 'magic bullet' approach to the complexities of teaching the NT's unique blend of rural and remote, Indigenous and non-Indigenous students won't suffice. Our studies and that of our New Zealand colleagues working with mixed Maori schools have shown that limited approaches that concentrate on, for example, direct instruction in phonics and basic skills, or to take another example, introducing Indigenous content, or, to take a further example, to stress stronger community involvement in and of themselves will not lead to systematic improvement on the range of important indicators. The point of our work has been that schools and systems – with all good intentions – tend to over-invest in single approaches as panaceas. These 'single-barreled' approaches may generate isolated spikes in achievement or improve on-site morale but cannot by definition move your schools and your systems along in a coherent and consistent way.

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What is so laudable about your work is that it is whole scale at the system and school level. It offers a realistic but positive overview of challenges, and then proceeds to provide a larger template for moving schools and classrooms, teachers and administrators, students and communities forward. I've just finished discussions with the Ontario Ministry about their approaches to Indigenous education, and they've just begun to develop this kind of comprehensive approach that your document so laudably encapsulates. You and your colleagues have addressed many of the specific policy dilemmas and potential problems head on in your call for shared and flexible definitions of student success, a focus on early years, improved school-community relations, engagement with the varied pathways and trajectories of students to employment, further study and community participation, and the embedding of local cultural, language and history in classroom curricula. Our studies found that the handful of schools that actually were making a difference for significant numbers of Indigenous students were taking this multiple approach – and that it was possible for local school principals to drive and implement change across these multiple agendas.

Your foundational principles very much reflect what Professor Russell Bishop was able to establish in Maori educational contexts and the findings of the work of American Indian researchers at Arizona State University: that a strong focus on “meaningful relationships” at all levels of the system – between students and teachers, but also between schools and communities, non-Indigenous and Indigenous staff, elders and youth, and between the curriculum and the local environment, land, and cultural history have to be in place in order for any of the more ‘traditional’ reforms to work. The research evidence is compelling that we can fiddle with curriculum, with accountability and assessment, even with funding – but if the fundamental focus on quality of human and intercultural relations is missing, any effects of our reforms will be transient.

This said, putting these foundational principles and approaches in place will have the effect of ‘setting the table’ for the main game: excellent teaching and learning that engages students’ existing knowledges and backgrounds and flexibly expands their skills and capacities. The core of this will entail the professional development and support for “developing and redesigning curricula, teaching and learning practices, and resources”. Our Queensland ‘New Basics’ curriculum reforms in 2000 took a similar approach and were empirically shown to improve participation and achievement of Indigenous students in rural and remote schools.

Professional development will be key. This is the one area where we are on very firm ground, with many Canadian provinces and jurisdictions showing demonstrable improvement through systematic and well-supported professional development. Drawing upon these existing experiences and resources, and, as your document notes, working with partners in the use of online resources and “technology-supported in-servicing’ will be crucial. We have seen many excellent policy agendas fail because of the lack of sustained and ongoing will and resources in the professional support and development of teachers.

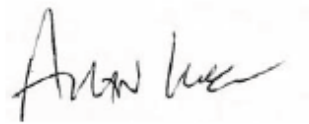
In all – then – your overall strategic approach is well-founded and reflects several decades of research evidence on Indigenous education. At the same time, it uses best practice approaches to school improvement more generally, and, if well supported and implemented, will yield improved pedagogy and outcomes for *all* students in the NT.

As a former senior bureaucrat, though, I offer a final critical caveat. Educational reforms and innovations everywhere are at risk of being hampered by the short attention spans of

governments and bureaucracies. To see any concrete changes in student pathways, experiences and outcomes will require sustained commitment, focus and will over a five-year period at the least. The policy research has well established that while elected governments often think of 2 or 3 or 4 year reform cycles that correspond with electoral patterns – that systematic school improvement and reform requires at the least 4-5 years to generate any demonstrable results. This isn't just due to the time it takes for implementation and professional development. The building and rebuilding of quality relations is obviously a longer term enterprise. And the very nature of the growth, development and empirical demonstration of improved learning in young people requires time, focus and perseverance from a system. As I said at the onset, the fields of Indigenous education and of school reform are littered with 'one shot', 'magic bullet' solutions. Yours is comprehensive – but it will require time.

Please feel free to pass on these comments to the Minister and others involved in the reforms. I offer my congratulations on your strategic work to date, wish you the best as you embark on these reforms. Let's keep a dialogue going about your progress and I'll assist in any way I can.

Sincerely,



Allan Luke

BA (Calif), ProCert, MA, PhD, Hon.LLD (S. Fraser), Hon.PhD (Rajabhat), Hon.Ed.D. (James Cook)

Adjunct Professor – Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, Canada

Emeritus Professor – Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Honorary Professor – Beijing Normal University, PRC



Dr. Sharon Friesen, President of Galileo Educational Network and Vice Dean of the Faculty of Education, University of Calgary, Alberta



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March 28, 2014

John Stewart
Director, Renewal and Innovation Division
Education, Culture and Employment
Department of Education, Culture and Employment
P.O. Box 1320
YELLOWKNIFE, NT Xi! 2L9

Dear. John;

I want to commend the Renewal and Innovation Division and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment on the vision for education articulated in *Education Renewal and Innovation Framework: Directions for Change*.

The Path to Change and A New Direction as outlined in Chapter 2 of the *Framework* is exceptionally well researched and conceptualized. It is fully in alignment with a recent 2013 mixed-methods longitudinal research study conducted in Australia on Indigenous education in that country. The Australian research study provided a contemporary picture of educational challenges and issues facing Indigenous communities. The context for change set out in Chapter 1 of the *Framework* strongly parallel many of the challenges and issues faced identified in the *Framework* by many Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories.

It is refreshing to see that the Framework frames Indigenous people's experiences, talents and capabilities as a strength rather than perpetuating a more conventional deficit perspective. This is apparent within the *Framework* as it identifies the need for place-based, contextually relevant curriculum, assessment and teaching that includes cultural knowledge, a deep web of relationships and community participation. It is heartening and significant to see the call for a curriculum and ways of teaching that go beyond generic basic skills training to that which embraces and embeds Indigenous content, knowledges, topics and contexts into everyday teaching and learning.

The commitments contained within Chapter 3 of the Framework are exceptionally well conceived and cohere with the articulated need for change and the new proposed direction. It addresses the need to build a web of school-community relationships as well as the need to ensure student well-being. It also acknowledges that educators need access to the diverse experiences of the Northern peoples, as well as appropriate resources to ensure excellence in teaching and student learning experiences. Acknowledging and committing to a renewed K-12 curriculum that is taught in an evidence-based, research-based manner

is essential in today's world as new findings of how people learn continue to emerge. It is worth noting your commitment to updating and renewing assessment practices to align with more closely with contemporary research on the ways in which learning and assessment support each other within instruction. The alignment of learning, instruction, and assessment are critical as the research is clear that when these three components of a student's learning are aligned, student achievement is strengthened and accelerated by up to one full year. The monitoring and accountability processes provided within *Education Renewal and Innovation Framework: Directions for Change* presents a balanced informed prescription and informed professionalism to ensure the K-12 programs, supports and needs of all learners and communities are in place.

I strongly encourage you as you continue to work with Aboriginal communities and governments to ensure *Education Renewal and Innovation Framework: Directions for Change* becomes a reality. I wish you all the best and am honored that I was able to make a small contribution towards such a powerful and uplifting vision for the children of the North.

Sincerely yours,



Sharon Friesen, PhD
Professor and Vice Dean
Werklund School of Education
University of Calgary

Student Voices on Education Renewal

What do you think is the most exciting part of Education Renewal and educational change?

“The most exciting part of ERI is the issues and concerns being brought up and discussed. It is good to know that there is effort to make a change for the better.”

“The willingness to depart from the norm and the fact that a diverse pool of voices is contributing to the changes.”

“Our input. In the past, people our age have always been disregarded as being too young to understand. Now, people our age are the best equipped to understand the problems that we will face.”

“The fact that we have a voice and matter to the changes that future students will receive.”

“Discussions like this are awesome, the discussion should not change. There is nothing negative to say about this.”

“The most exciting part is to perhaps see one day my ideas changing the way how the country or world views education.”

“That things are changing, and that different and non-traditional methods of teaching are being considered.”

“The possibility of having a better educational experience.”

“These changes will really help us with our stress levels and improve our mental and physical health.”

“The most exciting part would be being able to feel that educators actually care about their students and are considering changing things to improve student learning.”

Other Comments:

“Discussions like this are awesome, the discussion should not change. There is nothing negative to say about this.”

“I honestly don't think anything should change about this thing, it seems really great and I'm glad I got to go to this!”